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Hackles rise over 'no tartan tax'

Blair accused of insulting the Scots

By Gillian Bowditch, Arthur Leathley and Philip Webster

TONY BLAIR suffered his worst day of the election campaign so far yesterday after comparing Labour's proposed Scottish parliament to an English parish council and banning it from raising taxes for at least five years.

Travelling north to rally his Scottish troops, Mr Blair further upset his hosts by saying that if Labour were elected, sovereignty would remain with Westminster and with "me as an English MP".

John Major exploited Mr Blair's tough reception by claiming that the Labour campaign was falling apart. "The moment they are asked questions in detail they don't know the answers," he said. "They can produce slogans, fine words and the soft smiles but when it comes to hard substance which determines what government is really about, they fall to pieces."

The Prime Minister also rewrote his speech for his Albert Hall campaign rally last night to concentrate on Labour's discomfort. He claimed that Mr Blair's shift on devolution was a sign of untrustworthiness on other policies, and he predicted daily changes of stance as Labour's programme was put to the test.

He told 2,000 Tory activists: "Mr Blair both insults Scotland and breaks the promise he has given them for a long time. This is a man who only

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yesterday asked people to trust him. What a fall is here — from powerhouse to parish council in a soft phrase too many from the Labour leader. Not a minor matter of detail. It strikes at the heart of the United Kingdom itself."

But Mr Blair's aides professed satisfaction with the day's events, saying he had spent all day winning the headlines for making plain that the Scots would face no tax increases under Labour. However, his announcement that a Scottish Parliament would not be able to use its tax-raising powers — while doing no more than bringing Scotland into line with his pledge for the rest of Britain — inevitably raised questions about why he was giving it the powers in the first place.

Under Labour proposals, the parliament would have the ability to vary the basic rate of income tax by 3p in the pound. But *The Times* disclosed last year that Mr Blair would not allow it to raise taxes, a report vigorously denied by his aides. Yesterday Mr Blair con-

firmed for the first time that that was the case, but said that having the power to raise tax did not mean that it would be used. Becoming increasingly tetchy with journalists who questioned him about the apparent inconsistency, he insisted: "Having a power is not the same as using that power. The Labour Party is committed to not raising the basic and top rates of income tax. That commitment applies in Scotland as much as it applies in the rest of the UK."

Mr Blair's words about sovereignty were also certain to raise Scottish hackles, even though constitutionally, the Westminster Parliament would remain sovereign after devolution. In March 1989 every Scottish Labour MP except Tam Dalyell signed a document entitled "Claim of Right" which acknowledged "the sovereign right of the Scottish people".

Yesterday Mr Blair flatly contradicted that document by saying: "Sovereignty remains with Westminster that is why it is devolution. That is the constitutional fact. Devolution is the sensible third way between the Tories' policy of no change and the lunatic separatism of the SNP."

Scottish sensibilities were further enraged by an article in *The Scotsman* in which the Labour leader appeared to liken the tax-raising powers of



Joe Tizzard preparing yesterday to chase Grand National fortune with the country's leading jump jockeys. "You can't stop to think about the risks"

Young blood jumps at chance of National glory

By Rob Hughes

JOE TIZZARD, the 17-year-old son of a Dorset dairy farmer, will attempt to become the youngest Grand National winner for 60 years today.

With his 16-year-old girlfriend Caroline Tiffin and his parents in tow, he arrives straight out of school with nine GCSEs, a full set of teeth — which is uncommon among National Hunt jockeys — and the philosophy: "If you think about ending up in a wheelchair, you would never get on a horse."

Tizzard's birthday is December 13. If he were to win on the 66-1 outsider Straight Talk, he would be the second

youngest National winner this century, two weeks older than Bruce Hobbs, who won on Battleship, in 1938.

The Grand National, apart from its 30 fearsome fences and gruelling effect on the limbs and nerves of the country's most hardened jump jockeys, apparently holds no trepidation for Tizzard. He left school in the summer and, when not being brought down to earth milking the 180 Friesian cows on his parents' farm at Milborne Port, or shovelling manure, he dreams of keeping his weight down and chasing the achievements of his grandfather Dick Netley, who saddled Loving Words, which took third in the 1982

National. When Joe was a year old, he was put on the family pony, and insisted on riding around in his grandfather's colours.

The Jockey Club granted the young amateur special dispensation to ride with the 38 competitors in respect for his seven victories under rules and 17 wins in point-to-point races, in which his father Colin is a trainer.

The owner, trainer and backers of Straight Talk all describe Tizzard as an able and gifted horseman beyond his years.

Undismayed by the fact that on his last visit to Aintree Straight Talk, a ten-year-old bay gelding, unseated Tony

McCoy, arguably the leading National Hunt jockey of the day, Tizzard describes his race plan. "I shall drive up to Aintree with my father in the morning, then walk the course," he says confidently. "In the race, I'm hoping to creep through the field and take the lead in the final third... You can't stop to think about the risks."

Alas, not everyone will be cheering for him. A mystery punter who placed a bet of £76,000 with William Hill in London, stands to win £550,000 if Wyldes Hide wins at 16-1.

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Ashdown plea for the 'can-do' spirit

By Our Political Editor

PADDY ASHDOWN rejected suggestions that a Liberal Democrat vote would be wasted yesterday as he promised fresh spending on education and health, financed by an extra penny on income tax and a new top rate of 50p.

Launching his party's manifesto Mr Ashdown said: "A Liberal vote is not a wasted vote if you want more investment in your kid's school, if you want more investment to solve the crisis in the hospitals. A Liberal Democrat vote is the only vote you have got."

"It's not a wasted vote in those 150 seats where the Liberal Democrat is the only alternative to the Conservatives."

Putting the cost of his policies at 45p a week for the average taxpayer, he added: "If you don't think 45p is worth it to make sure your kid gets a decent education to prepare us for the future, that we don't have to sack all those teachers that are being sacked at present year after year; that your child doesn't have to be in a class of 40 or more; to make sure they don't have to use photocopyers to study in the evening; that they have access to computers to prepare us for the future, the answer is simple — don't vote for us."

"We are told that nothing can be done. That it has to be like this. It doesn't have to be like this. We've got to break the fatalism of our politics. We've got to get this country's 'can-do' spirit back and there is nothing we cannot achieve."

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Boning up on the evolutionary scale

By Nigel Hawkes, Science Editor

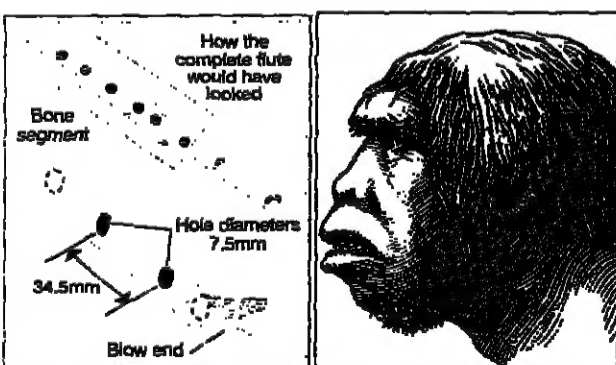
NEANDERTHAL Man could play sweet music, according to an analysis of the oldest known musical instrument, a flute made from the thigh bone of a bear.

The flute was found in a cave in Slovenia, and dated to between 43,000 and 67,000 years ago — at least 10,000 years older than any previously known instrument.

The bone, less than four inches long, contains two neatly drilled holes and the traces of two more at its broken end. Now Bob Fink, a Canadian musician, has worked out the notes the flute could play when it was complete.

He concludes that the instrument is based on the same seven-note scale used in modern Western music. The flute as it survives could play four notes (Mi, Fa, So and La) in a minor key.

In its original form it would have been about 15 inches long and capable of playing the entire scale. He has made a



The bone flute: sweet music from Neanderthal Man

flute matching the pattern of holes found in the bone, and found that when played it confirmed the analysis.

The results are striking because Neanderthals are generally considered to have been uncultured humans with no language and no art. If confirmed, they cast a new light on their behaviour.

Neanderthals first appeared about 200,000 years ago and

disappeared 30,000 years ago. Most experts now believe that they were a dead-end in human evolution, an offshoot that did not evolve into modern man but was eventually replaced by him.

The results also suggest, in Mr Fink's view, that the notion of harmony is "hard-wired" into the human brain. Not something that is learnt. This view, which is opposed

by many musicologists, is backed by research showing that babies react differently to a pair of harmonious notes played together than they do to a pair of discordant notes.

The section of flute was found in July 1995 by Slovenian archaeologist Dr Ivan Turk alongside other Neanderthal artefacts. Teeth and soil from the same layer of earth in which the flute was found were dated by Dr Bonnie Blackwell of Queens College in New York.

She concluded it was at least 43,000 years old and possibly as old as 67,000 years.

She acknowledged that the holes could have been made by an animal but added: "It would be pretty surprising to have an animal make them in such a straight line."

Dr Turk said: "The flute reinforces the basic humanness of the Neanderthals. I can't imagine a group having conscious music without having language."

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Teachers boo Shephard attack on union

BY DAVID CHARTER
EDUCATION CORRESPONDENT

GILLIAN SHEPHARD was hissed and booed by more than 500 teachers yesterday after she said that industrial action was unacceptable behaviour. The Education and Employment Secretary was heckled as teachers insisted that giving parents the power to stop them striking would deepen the crisis of indiscipline in schools.

Speaking to the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers, Mrs Shephard defended Conservative manifesto plans to allow those affected by strikes to halt them with a court

injunction. The union said that this would give even more power to unruly pupils and their parents to disrupt school life. The union has won several high-profile victories against troublesome children by threatening to strike if forced to teach them, and will consider industrial action next term to prevent the return on appeal of two boys expelled for carrying an air pistol at Yorkshire Marjory's Collegiate School, Bradford. Mrs Shephard yesterday praised the union for bringing discipline problems at The Ridings School, Halifax, into the spotlight, but said striking was "not the way for professional people to behave".

In an uncompromising perfor-

mance at the NASUWT annual conference in Bournemouth, she endured jeers throughout her speech over nursery vouchers, school inspection and plans to appraise teachers based on their pupils' results.

The barracking marked a growing stand-off between politicians and teacher unions during their Easter conference season.

David Blunkett, Mrs Shephard's Labour Shadow, told the more militant National Union of Teachers that he would not accept "bullying" tactics from teachers. He said it was not acceptable for them to strike over government policies.

Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the NASUWT, said he would

balloon his 165,000 members for industrial action if the next Government did not cut workload within a year. The union yesterday voted to boycott after-school homework clubs, a key part of Labour's plans, unless they were paid extra. Labour responded by saying it wanted the clubs to be staffed by students and elderly volunteers.

A survey for the union next week will confirm teachers' dissatisfaction with politicians by showing a large percentage undecided over who to vote for. Mr de Gruchy said: "Both manifestos of the two main parties are so uninteresting. The Conservative re-hashes all the old arguments about structure and does nothing to

raise the morale of teachers. Labour makes more of a move towards helping the teaching profession by reducing class sizes."

Mr de Gruchy told Mrs Shephard her plans further to limit industrial action struck "at the very heart of human freedom".

Mrs Shephard said the conference had been "stimulating and enjoyable" and left in a defiant mood. "You have said goodbye to me but don't hold your breath," she said. "I'll be back."

Mr de Gruchy responded: "We hope to welcome you back. I am sure it will be quite an experience to come back as a Shadow of your former self."

Central London gridlocked by rail bomb alerts

BY RICHARD FORD AND
MICHAEL HORSNELL

LARGE areas of central London were gridlocked last night after bomb alerts at mainline rail stations forced the closure of surrounding main roads.

As British Transport police searched King's Cross, St Pancras, Waterloo and Euston after telephoned threats, senior officers held an anti-terrorist summit to discuss ways of combating a new IRA strategy aimed at causing maximum disruption in the run-up to the election.

A spokesman for the AA said: "Major roads have been sealed off because of security alerts and central London is pretty well gridlocked. This is one of the worst cases of delay we have ever seen."

The alerts led to the suspension for several hours of mainline rail services in and out of King's Cross, St Pancras and the Thameslink line at King's Cross. Underground services were also suspended before the start of the rush-hour. Tube trains were later allowed to run but not to stop at King's Cross.

Traffic problems were exacerbated by subsidence at Westminster Underground station due to excavations for the Jubilee Line. Eastbound traffic was not allowed to cross Westminster Bridge.

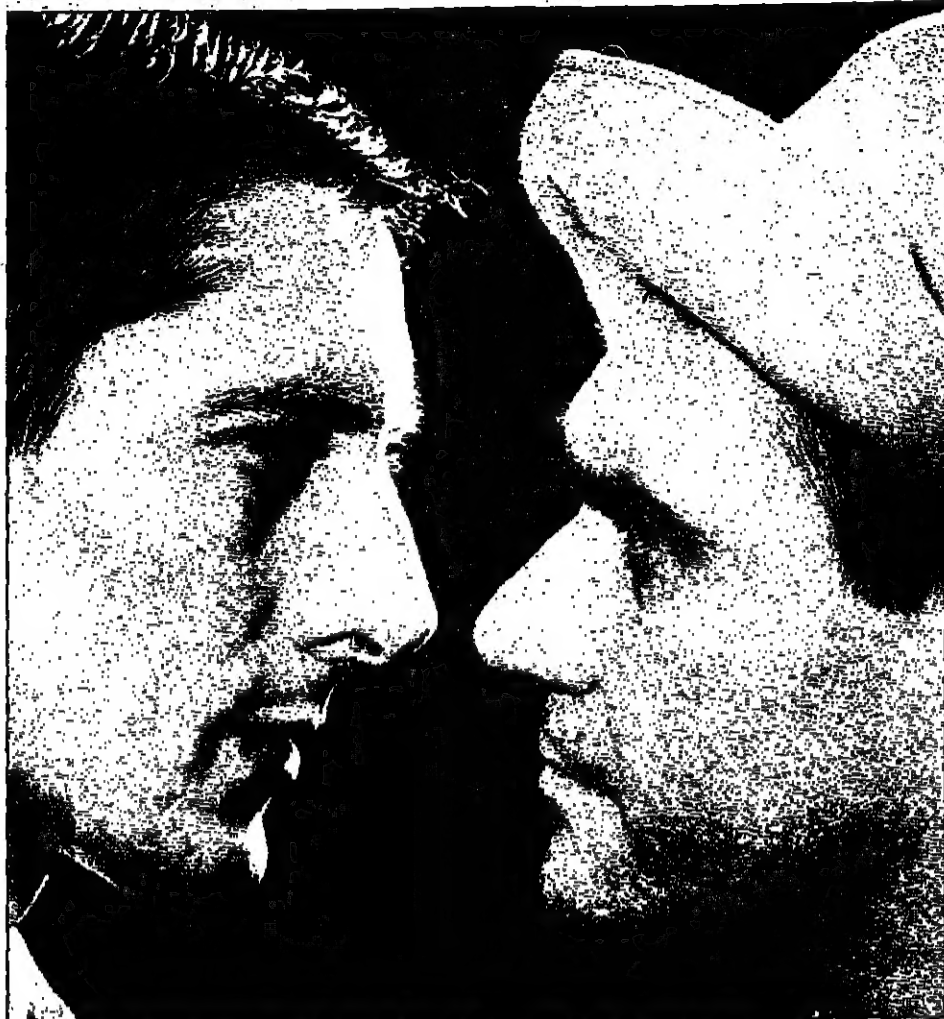
The anti-terror summit took place as police reopened stretches of the M5 and the

The driver of an articulated lorry died early yesterday when it careered off a bridge and blocked the main West Coast railway line. No other vehicle was involved in the accident on the A519 in the Staffordshire hamlet of Millmead, near Eddesbush. The crash affected commuters trying to avoid traffic jams caused by the M5 and M6 closures.

M6 in the West Midlands which had been closed to traffic for more than 30 hours after bombs were planted under an elevated section of the carriageway. There were unconfirmed reports that one of the bombs placed under the M6 contained up to 1½ lb of Semtex high explosive, enough to cause severe damage to a main junction.

Commander John Grieve, head of Scotland Yard's Anti-Terrorist Branch, took part in the summit in his role as national co-ordinator for combating terrorist activity.

Mervyn Jones, Chief Constable of Cheshire, said the meeting demonstrated that the country's 43 police forces worked very closely on tackling terrorism. "By collectively looking at the pattern of activity in these incidents, we are able to address the big picture and bring together all of the information relevant to our particular investigations."



Simon Pemberton (Peter Wingfield), left, and Eddie Grundy (Trevor Harrison)

Forget the polls, Eddie's safe

BY ROBIN YOUNG

A VILLAGE crisis that sparked a nationwide campaign ended happily last night as the bachelorette and her fiancé, Eddie Grundy, kept control of Grange Farm in The Archers, defeating eviction by a dastardly landlord, Simon Pemberton.

The latest plot in the Radio 4 drama had appeared to grip more of Middle England than the election, and led listeners launching a pro-Grundy campaign which sought the support of John Gummer, the Environment Secretary.

Despite an agricultural track record which included a conviction for leaving sheep undipped two years ago, another for polluting the river with slurry run-off from their

ill-kept farmyard, and no fewer than eight livestock escapes in the past year alone, Eddie Grundy was heard by four million listeners as he returned from an agricultural tribunal hearing and told his wife, Clarrie: "We've won love. It's all right now Clarrie. It's all over."

Pemberton had based his case for eviction on two points: the Grundys' poor husbandry and the argument that the land could be more profitably used if farmed directly by the estate. The evidence which turned the verdict against him was given by Shula Hebden (née Archer), formerly Pemberton's estate agent, who weighed in as expert farming witness on behalf of her family's erstwhile enemies, the grubby

and ever-grumbling Grundys. Pemberton may not be finished yet. There could be trouble ahead for Susan Carter, his employee, who risked her job by telling the Grundys' legal representatives that he secretly planned to put Grange Farm entirely down to the EU grant-rich crop of the moment, flax.

"This has been one of our most successful stories of recent years," said *The Archers* editor, Vanessa Whitburn, criticised in the past for introducing swearing, drug taking, armed robbery, suicide, racism, domestic violence and abortion to the everyday saga of countryfolk. "It featured a dramatic conflict between strong characters, while reflecting the real erosion of smaller, traditional farms."

Islanders celebrate buy-out

The 64 islanders of Eigg were celebrating last night after having bought the Hebridean isle, ending the long and bitter reign of absentee private lairds. Their £15 million offer was accepted by those acting for Martin Eckhart Maruma, a German artist who bought Eigg less than two years ago. The island is "dry", with no pubs or hotels, but islanders believe that private cellars will provide a celebratory drink. The Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust will become the official island owners on June 12.

Woman starved

The daughter of a former Tory MP starved to death, a coroner's court found. Catherine Bingham, 39, of Heswall, Merseyside, weighed three stone when police found her dead at home last month. Her father was the late Richard Bingham.

Murder charge

Police last night charged Samson Gower, 18, with the murder of poet Deborah Thomas, 37, who was found battered to death in her blazing home in Brighton on Easter Day. He will appear at the town's magistrates' court this morning.

Record GP quits

Dr Adrian Caro, who once held the world record for the most hours on duty in a week — 139 — is to retire from general practice in Dereham, Norfolk, because of stress. In 1971 he led a junior hospital doctors' strike against excessive working hours.

Princess's riches

Diana, Princess of Wales, has made her first appearance in the annual listing by *The Sunday Times* of Britain's 1,000 richest people. Her divorce settlement helped her to share 916th place with the cook Delia Smith. Both women are worth £17 million.

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Scotland

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a Scottish parliament to those of an English parish council. His comparison may have been designed to reassure English voters who fear that Labour could destabilise Britain with its plans for constitutional change. But the Scots took it as a further emasculation of the parliament they have waited 300 years to see.

Michael Forsyth, the Scottish Secretary, said: "Tony Blair's dismissive remarks about a Scottish parliament betray the extent to which he has duped his own Scottish supporters. If he agrees with us that sovereignty must remain at Westminster, why does he not abandon this reckless scheme?"

The comparison of a Scottish parliament with a parish council was "blatantly dishonest", but if what Scotland was to get was "no more significant than a parish council, why risk the integrity of the United Kingdom?"

Sir David Steel of the Liberal Democrats said: "Tony Blair should leave talking about Scotland to his Scottish colleagues who understand the issues. Sadly when he opens his mouth on the subject he puts his foot in it."

"He says 'sovereignty resides with the Westminster parliament' and that we are not devolving 'sovereignty'. Frankly that is gobbledegook."

Sellafield fined over unsafe transport

OPERATORS of the Sellafield nuclear plant showed a "total disregard" of repeated warnings that a bridge carrying radioactive waste over a railway line was in danger of collapse, a magistrate said yesterday.

British Nuclear Fuels was fined the maximum of £20,000 and ordered to pay costs of £3,844 by Whitehaven Magistrates' Court in Cumbria after it admitted breaching the Radioactive Substances Act.

The court was told that, for more than six years, the state-owned company failed to act on a series of recommendations that it should carry out "urgent and immediate" repair work on the 100-yard long bridge carrying the main low-level radioactive discharge from the plant over the Barrow-to-Carlisle railway line and out into the Irish Sea.

Steven Zdolny, for the prosecution, told the court that there had been a risk that a collapse of the bridge could fracture the pipe and allow radioactive material to escape. Frank Hornsby, the chairman of the Bench, said the public had a right to expect that BNFL should fully carry out its responsibilities. "The total disregard of reports prepared between 1990 and 1995 recommending urgent remedial action is of grave concern," he said.

The Environment Agency, which brought the prosecution, accepted that the environmental results of any collapse of the bridge would have been small because the plant's leak-detection system would have shut off the discharge.

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Ford Escort reaches the end of the road

BY TIM JONES

THE Ford Escort, one of the most famous yet derided names in motoring, is nearing the end of the road. More than 30 years after the People's Car rolled off the production lines, Ford is looking to rename the humble family saloon which has numbered Diana, Princess of Wales, Essex Woman and the Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, among its fans.

The company is seeking to consign the name to the history books and come up with a sleeker, slicker moniker to drive the car into the new millennium. It is a high-risk strategy which yesterday surprised industry experts and the advertising agencies, which know the value of a tried and tested brand name. The move may even dismay some of the 18 million people worldwide who have bought the modest mid-market saloon which has been restyled many times since it was launched in its Mark I form in 1968.

Although no firm decision has yet been taken, the company is expected to pay image consultants up to £500,000 to come up with a new name. For a car which has supplied the company's bread-and-butter profits for three decades, it will be a decision Ford cannot afford to get wrong.

In spite of being associated with Essex girls and having its acoustic properties tested by young men with loud music systems, the Escort has also been loved by upmarket enthusiasts. Diana, Princess of



Satisfied customers: Ford Escort drivers have come from all walks of life and have included Diana, Princess of Wales, and Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor

Wales, once owned a 115 mph Ford Escort Cabriolet and Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, still drives a red M-registered model.

Professor Garel Rhys, an industry expert of Cardiff University, said: "Escort is already a European name. It is unthinkable that VW or Toyota would kick names such as Golf or Corolla into touch."

Trevor Beattie, creative director of GGT advertising,

said: "I am not surprised they are thinking of changing the name, just disappointed. The Escort name, after all these years, means something. I just know a new name will be something ludicrous and meaningless, wind-tested so as not to offend any nation on Earth. I dread to think what they will come up with."

Moray MacLennan of M&C Saatchi, the advertising agency, said: "Changing the name of a well-loved product

can be dangerous but the company will not be altering the essential Fordness of the car."

"They will want a name which will retain the heritage and warm values of the old product while creating something for the new millennium. It could be quite tricky."

Since it first rolled off the production line in 1968, as a sedate family saloon which went from 0-60 in a stately 22.3 seconds, reaching a top speed

of 75 mph, the Escort has undergone five reincarnations. The latest 1.8 injection two door cabriolet reaches 60mph in 10 seconds and has a top speed of 120 mph.

Special editions, much favoured by boy racers, have included the Mexico, the RS2000, XR3i and the exotically named Calypso. And where they were once sold in only bland colours they now can be had in Chianti Red, Mint Green, Bahama Blue and

Spring Violet. For three years in a row, in the early 1980s, the Escort was the world's best-selling car and, until recently, the top-selling model in Britain.

Ford's decision earlier this year to cease producing the Escort at its plant in Halewood, Merseyside, threatened the company with a national strike. That was averted only when the Government stepped in with a £15 million grant to ensure

that a "people carrier", based on the Escort, would be made at the factory.

The replacement car for the current model, known only as the "World Escort", is to be built in Cologne. It will be launched next year.

A spokesman for the company said no decision had been taken on whether the Escort name would be scrapped. "We cannot confirm or deny what the replacement will be called."

Cemetery extension is grave intrusion for tycoon

BY SHIRLEY ENGLISH

A TYCOON who once said he was driven by fear of death has blocked plans to extend a village cemetery onto a section of his Scottish estate, Christopher Moran says it would spoil the view.

Mr Moran, 49, says he is not prepared to part with the third of an acre site to Moray council, even if they offered £1 million. He says any expansion would mean that he could see graves from the top windows of Cabrach House on Speyside.

The land is needed to extend the 200-year-old cemetery beside Cabrach parish church. Moray council, which wants the area legally designated as a burial ground, is seeking a compulsory purchase order from Elgin Sheriff Court. The council says the extension would last the community for another 200 years.

Mr Moran, 49, who heads an insurance broking and investment business in London, is one of Britain's wealthiest men. He owns the Cabrach and Glenfiddich estates near Dufftown, which cover 46,000 acres across the heart of Scotland's malt whisky country.

In a profile in a Sunday newspaper he was reputed to be worth about £150 million. He said his ambition and drive came from his fear of death. "The one thing on my mind since I was a child is that I am going to die. Time is short and if you have the ability it is a duty to do what you can. I cannot waste a day."

Mr Moran, who was not available for comment yesterday, has offered two alternative sites on his land for the cemetery, which the council says are unsuitable because they would create a separate graveyard, preventing relatives being buried next to loved ones.

Consultant will be paid £500,000 to test-drive new brand name

BY ALAN COPPE

WHATEVER name is chosen to replace the long-serving Escort, the £500,000 Ford is expected to pay a branding consultant will be money well spent if it avoids some of the deeper potholes on the road to a new car name.

Even the world's most prestigious carmaker is not immune. Rolls-Royce wanted to add to its renowned catalogue of Silver Ghosts and Silver Shadows a model named the Silver Mist —

until a linguist among the executives at Crewe pointed out that "Mist" in German meant "dung". Toyota has exactly the same problem in France, where its neat little MR2 coupe, enunciated in French as "Emm-erre-deux", sounds rather like "merde".

General Motors' problem in Spain was less scatological but just as tricky. When the Vauxhall Nova was renamed the Corsa, the official reason was the harmonisation of marketing throughout Europe, but the real problem was that in Spain

Nova is the equivalent of saying "it doesn't go".

The Escort can justly claim to be the first "Eurocar". Identical models made at Halewood on Merseyside and Cologne in Germany were introduced in 1967 and more than 18.5 million have been sold worldwide since then. But the name backs back to the days when cosy but dignified Anglo-Saxon titles like Prefect, Popular and Anglia adorned Ford's bestsellers, a far cry from the aggressive Probe, animal Puma and all-embracing Mondeo

which grace some of its current range.

One of the biggest consultancies in the business is the London-based Interbrand, which has worked for most of the world's carmakers. Interbrand gets a thorough briefing on the car's specification and intended market, and then calls in its brainstorming committee — 100 part-timers ranging from resting actors to housewives, from civil servants to peers.

"These are all people chosen for their wide vocabularies, their com-

mand of imagery and their ability to converse together," says Interbrand's Tom Blackett. "They do The Times crossword, they are good at Scrabble, they have verbal facility and felicity. Ten or 12 have been with us since we started 22 years ago."

"We have access to the registers of names run by national motor industries and have our own massive database. We also have a software programme which can assemble words at random. "We might give it a three-letter

start and see what comes out. Suzuki wanted a name to project the vitality of their small off-roader, so we gave the computer "Vit" and asked for every vowel-consonant-vowel combination to finish it off. In the long string of quasi-words that came streaming out we found Vitara. They liked it."

In fact the Japanese take the biscuit when it comes to car names, giving us such gems as the Nissan Cedric and the Mazda Bongo Friendee. Toyota's latest offering in Britain is the Picnic.

Murder witness's hands cut off in pub

BY A STAFF REPORTER

A MURDER trial witness told a court yesterday how his hands were almost severed with a butcher's knife when he was attacked by a gang in a crowded pub.

Members of the gang pinned down David Jacobs and stopped other drinkers coming to his aid during the attack, which was part of a campaign of intimidation against witnesses, Worcester Crown Court was told.

Mr Jacobs, 32, a former builder who is unable to work because of his injuries, said he had been chatting to friends in a pub in Rubery, Birmingham, last year when he noticed a group walk in at closing time. "I saw one of them had a mask on and he looked round at me and pulled a big knife out of his coat. It was about 18 inches long and looked like it was sharp on both sides."

Mr Jacobs threw his glass at the man and tried to run away but was cornered. "I looked at my hands and I could see broken bones and tendons. My hands were hanging off. I got back up on my feet and that was when the blood started coming. I started shouting 'get an ambulance.' His hands were sewn back in a series of operations."

Ronald Clarke, 30, of Newtown, Birmingham, and James McDavid, 28, of Frankley, West Midlands, deny causing grievous bodily harm with intent to Mr Jacobs. They also deny violent disorder. Lee Anderson, 25, of Rowley Regis, Birmingham and John Wilson, 25, of Northfield, Birmingham, deny violent disorder. The trial continues.

Ex-principal returns missing art to Durham

BY PAUL WILKINSON

THE former principal of a university college who left after discrepancies were disclosed in his academic qualifications has returned a number of objects d'art to the college after a flurry of legal letters.

Lawyers wrote to the Rev Duane Wade-Hampton Arnold when staff at St Chad's at Durham could not find the pieces after his departure last month. They included a coral crucifix presented by its founder in 1904, which the college had valued at £40,000, a Georgian chest of drawers worth more than £1,000, at least one painting and a number of ornaments.

Last night Dr Arnold, who is now at the Concordia theological seminar in Fort Wayne, Indiana, said: "Some items were inadvertently taken by the removers. They have been returned. The matter is now closed."

However he and the college are disputing the ownership of the Georgian chest, which he insists is his. Oliver Hyams, his British solicitor, said he had bought it and taken it back with him. "If it is worth £200, he will be lucky."

The Rt Rev Michael Hensall, chairman of the college governors, said: "We have documentary evidence which shows the chest predates his arrival here. The crucifix had been removed from a safe in the chapel and taken into Dr Arnold's lodgings, ostensibly for safekeeping."

Dr Arnold resigned in January, while on three months leave of absence, after details of his qualifications listed in



Arnold: said items had been taken by removers

Who's Who and other reference books proved to be bogus. He blamed clerical errors and a plot against him by academics who disapproved of his radical methods. He is taking the college and university to an industrial tribunal alleging constructive dismissal.

Mr Hyams said that the college had asked about 11 missing items. Dr Arnold had found seven when he unpacked the container of his effects in the US. Besides the crucifix and the desk there was a desk lamp, a letter rack, an ash tray, a tray and a small safe. He claimed that none had any great value. Of the other four items, one painting was found in Britain at the restorers and a second painting was found in the college.

"The container was packed by the removal men after he had left the country. Frankly he sees this all as a storm in a tea-cup," Mr Hyams said.

The college, which had approached Durham police to investigate the matter, has told the force it is dealing with the matter itself.

Fireman's love of job drove him to arson

BY A STAFF REPORTER

A PART-TIME fireman has been detained for two years after admitting a series of arson attacks.

Matthew Whiting, 19, derived such excitement from fighting fires that he began to set them. The judge told him that his actions had let down his family, particularly his father, who had been a fireman for 35 years.

Edmund Walters, for the prosecution, told Reading Crown Court that Whiting had started the fires — causing damage of almost £30,000 — in the Hungerford area of Berkshire last summer. He had set fire to a stack of barley straw, bales of hay and a Dutch barn.

Whiting, of Hungerford, admitted four counts of arson and asked for a further arson charge to be taken into consideration. The court was told that he had been a retained firefighter at Hungerford Fire Station from 1994 until he resigned in 1996 after being arrested.

Paul Reid, for the defence, said: "Whiting's father was a long-serving fireman. His brother is a fireman. He wanted to become a fireman from a very young age. He loved the job. It's clear he loved the thrill of it... the rush of adrenalin when his bleeper went off... when he went to the station with the engines running, the lights flashing."

Judge Spence, said: "It was a total abuse of your trust as a firefighter, as a protector of society." He ordered Whiting to be detained for two years in a Young Offenders' Institution. No order for costs or compensation was made.



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JACK DANIEL'S TENNESSEE WHISKEY

Elton John steps lightly into sixth decade

BY EMMA WILKINS



John: will celebrate with 600 friends

THE centrepiece of a lavish fiftieth birthday party for Elton John tomorrow will be a display by a ballroom dancing team from South Wales. But there won't be a sequin in sight when the 16-strong Ystrad Fawr Formation Team takes to the floor at London's Hammersmith Palais because their manager regards spangles as "old hat".

The fancy dress party for 600 people has been organised under the strictest secrecy by the pop star's

management team. Phillip Perry was happy to discuss his troupe's routine but fell silent when pressed about whether John would join in. "I can tell you about the dancing, but I can't betray the trust of my client about any other details," he said.

The male dancers will be in tails and the women in fuchsia pink flowing dresses. "We won't have a single sequin. We regard all that as rather old hat. We don't go for glitter any more," Mr Perry said.

The purple and gold invita-

tions, embossed with a gold crest, invite guests for 6.30pm with carriages at 1am. The guest list is reported to include George Michael, Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall, Rod Stewart, Nanette Newman and Gianni Versace.

John, who celebrated his actual birthday on March 25 with a small party in Los Angeles, has already received an exclusive early present: honorary membership of the Royal Academy of Music, an accolade also given to Mendelssohn, Liszt and Richard Strauss.

Tax shake-up launches a boom for accountants

By MARIANNE CURPHEY, DEPUTY PERSONAL FINANCE EDITOR

ACCOUNTANTS are gearing up for a bonanza when nine million self-assessment forms for income tax are sent out next week.

The Inland Revenue insisted yesterday that the forms had been made as simple as possible for the change. However, the financial services industry is likely to make between £50 and £500 per case for helping worried taxpayers.

The new form, which will be sent out from Monday, has eight pages and up to nine supplementary sections. Taxpayers face a fine of £100 if it has not been returned by next January 31 and a further £100 if it is not returned by the following July.

One in three adults will be affected by self-assessment, which begins with the new financial year starting today. It applies to the self-employed, company directors, higher-rate taxpayers, some pensioners and those described by the Revenue as having "unusual" tax affairs. Recipients can choose whether they want to calculate their tax and send a cheque, or send all the details

and let the Inland Revenue do it.

Demand for accountants who can help to fill in tax forms is expected to double this year and a number of firms have set up one-stop shops in high streets. Although other countries, including the United States, require individuals to calculate their own tax, many have low-cost accountancy services that charge about £25 for a consultation.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales warned that those who did not seek advice might not be able to cope and could face fines. Consumer bodies have

advised people looking for an accountant to shop around.

The institute, which has 120,000 chartered accountants, said the new system was "wide open to misinterpretation" by taxpayers. Peter Hobbs, head of tax at the institute, said: "It will simply not be possible for many thousands of taxpayers to understand the forms sufficiently well to complete them correctly. It is vital that taxpayers seek help from properly qualified advisers."

A spokesman for the Inland Revenue said: "We have consulted widely on this tax return. It is a far more straightforward, simple and

easy-to-understand form than in the past."

One accountancy firm offering individuals help with the new forms is DBS Management, which will calculate an individual's tax bill for £75 a year. The service is available to employed (Schedule E) or retired taxpayers only.

Another is TAX etc, in London, which plans to set up new offices around the country later in the year. It offers an "off-the-street" one-hour assessment service, charging a flat fee of £100 where the tax affairs are relatively simple, and £150 for more complicated returns.

Ashley Deskin, a director, said: "As soon as the Revenue announced that it intended to change the whole tax system, we knew there would be an opportunity for us. This venture will potentially make us money — we are not a charitable organisation. However, the service will be mutually beneficial, since it is possible that we can save taxpayers money."

ONE STOP BUT A LOT OF QUESTIONS

TAXPAYERS who go to seek help from the new one-stop shops would need to bring details of the following:

- salary
- rental income, in the case of landlords
- investment income, including share dividends
- interest from building so-

- ciety and bank accounts
- income from overseas
- capital gains arising from assets bought and sold
- pension income.

They would also need to bring:

- P45 and P60 forms
- record of mortgage relief
- interest and other loans

Weekend Money, page 31

Greenwich denies its clock is second-best

By NIGEL HAWKES, SCIENCE EDITOR

THE Old Royal Observatory in Greenwich, home of time, defended itself yesterday against the charge that its latest showpiece clock cannot count the seconds until the end of the millennium.

The curse of the millennium clocks has already struck in Dublin and Paris, where clocks, designed to count down to 2000 have been withdrawn. But Greenwich shrugged off the charge that its clock is misleading because it takes no account of "leap seconds".

Dr Kristian Lippincott, director of the millennium project at the museum, said: "It tells the right time now and it'll be telling the right time on December 31, 1999." She agreed that the clock, which counts down the days, hours, minutes, seconds, tenths and hundredths of a second, does not take account of an extra second to be introduced on June 30 this year, to compensate for the slowing rotation of the Earth.



Andrew Loftus of Accurist, which made the millennium clock, checking the time

It would be wrong to do so until the exact moment when the world's most precise clocks are adjusted by adding the extra second, she said. There are likely to be several more leap seconds before 2000; all will be added at the appropriate moment.

This means that it is impossible to know now precisely how many seconds will elapse before we can raise the champagne glasses at midnight on December 31, 1999. The Earth has been slowing, but it might speed up, said Dr Lippincott. Leap seconds are introduced to ensure that atomic clocks, which keep better time than the spinning Earth, do not get out of synchrony with it.

Dr Lippincott also rebutted as pedantic charges that the observatory was celebrating the millennium too early.

Richard Morrison, page 19

Solicitor wins sex bias case

By LIN JENKINS

A SOLICITOR who was sacked for spurning her employer's sexual advances won her claim of sex discrimination yesterday. However, the industrial tribunal rejected Sheena Khan's case for unfair dismissal because she had falsified her curriculum vitae.

Miss Khan, 29, had rejected offers of romance from Robert Broudie, a criminal lawyer in Liverpool, but, when he continued to pester her, she recorded their conversations. On one occasion she saw him standing outside her home peering through a window. When she let him in he demanded she return half a cake which he had given her.

She said he had kissed her on the shoulder at the office Christmas party. His telephone calls to her home put her relationship with her boyfriend under pressure and they split seven months after she started the job.

The tribunal in Liverpool rejected her claim of unfair dismissal when it was disclosed that her curriculum vitae said she had been awarded a 2:1 degree by Leicester University. She had a 2:2 from Leicester Polytechnic.

Mr Broudie, 48, brother of the Lightning Seeds singer Ian Broudie, is to appeal against the judgment, which his solicitors described as "perverse".

Muggers' victim dies

A pensioner collapsed and died only hours after she was mugged for her purse, containing £80, while out shopping. Edna Brown, 75, of Scarborough, North Yorkshire, suffered a heart attack as she recovered from the shock of the theft at home. Police said later that three local men had been arrested.

Jaguar recall

Jaguar is to recall 4,766 of its new XJ6 sports cars, including 805 sold in Britain, because of a possible fault. The Coventry company said there had been three minor incidents involving the rear suspension. No one was hurt.

Rail crash trial

Peter Afford, 56, the driver of a commuter train that crashed last August at Watford Junction, killing a passenger, was committed for trial accused of manslaughter and endangering passengers' lives by failing to stop at a red signal.

Sound and Fury

Police have been unable to trace £150,000 worth of instruments stolen from a tour van of the Irish folk band The Fureys in Barking, east London. They include accordions, guitars, a bodhran drum and a banjo.

index

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ance. Cool.
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Lottery grants will buy pets for pensioners

BY ALEXANDRA FREAN

PENSIONERS and the infirm who need pets for companionship will soon be able to apply for lottery grants to buy, feed and care for them.

David Sieff, chairman of the National Lottery Charities Board, said yesterday that its aim was to help those at greatest disadvantage in society and to improve quality of life in the community. "The care and welfare of animals is also linked to the welfare of people, and so we want to support work with pets and other animals."

The grants for animals will be channelled through charities or local voluntary groups working with the elderly, the infirm or with animals. The money could also be used to help finance city farms, which give urban children a chance to get to know farmyard animals. A board spokesman said: "What we don't want is to simply give lottery money for animals which don't have any relation to helping people's lives. Pets are often very helpful for elderly people who

are lonely or for sick people who cannot get out."

Betty McBride, a spokeswoman for Help the Aged, welcomed the scheme: "If you are isolated, frail or lonely, having a pet can vastly improve the quality of your life. Caring for a pet can make you feel better about yourself. Although cats required less maintenance than dogs, a small dog was often a perfect pet for an elderly person, she said. "Keeping mobile is an essential part of growing older. It is one of those truisms that the more you get out, the fitter and healthier you will be. Having a small dog that you can take for a walk will increase your quality of life as well as keep the dog fit."

The RSPCA gave the plans a cautious welcome. A spokeswoman said: "Our concern would be that there was ongoing provision for the care of pets. The board will have to assess how people who get the grants are going to continue to pay for their animals for the rest of that animal's life. They

will also have to consider whether the grants will cover things such as pet insurance. We advise all pet owners to take out insurance so that they can pay for any medical treatment that their animal might need."

The cost of a dog or cat from an RSPCA rescue home varies from about £30 to £70. The cost of keeping a dog throughout an average life of 12 years is £7,324. The cost of a cat over an average 13 years is £7,827.

The plans are part of the board's fifth round of grant giving, which will also provide cash for charities or voluntary organisations working with homeless people and for community projects aimed at improving the environment. A total of about £160 million will be available for the schemes, under the joint titles of Voluntary Sector Development and Improving People's Living Environment.

The board will accept applications from May 6 to September 5. The telephone number for applications is 0345 919191.

Lost pup becomes dog of war

A STRAY puppy that crossed a minefield to join the Army has been officially enlisted with a name, rank, serial number and patrol duties.

Acting Gunner Hoosh D.O.G. service number 281296, was spotted by troops from 32 Regiment, Royal Artillery, who are on duty in Cyprus. Lance Bombardier Mark Crane said: "It was a

cold day. We saw a wet, bedraggled lump of fur in the minefield next to our observation post. At first, we thought the poor thing was dead, then it struggled to its feet and limped towards us, straight across the minefield. We went down to the wire and cheered when it crawled through."

The eight-week-old stray mongrel bitch had sores and

an injured leg and was taken to a vet for treatment. Bombardier Scott Dalton said: "We made a dogbed in a box that had contained drinks for our bar, so we called her Hoosh."

Now fully recovered, the dog is staying with patrols keeping the peace between Greek Cypriot and Turkish forces in the United Nations buffer zone.



Baron von Richthofen and the man he didn't kill: Lieutenant Patrick Garnett's Royal Aero Club membership book

Grandson downs Red Baron myth

BY ROBIN YOUNG

THE true story of a British pilot's death in a dogfight with the Red Baron has been uncovered after 80 years. Patrick Garnett was 22 when his Nieuport Scout biplane was shot down in March 1917.

Baron Manfred von Richthofen, the German air ace nicknamed the Red Baron, was so moved by his young foe's bravery that he wrote to Garnett's widow, Mary, whom he had married only ten weeks before, returning a scrap of her wedding dress which her husband had carried as a talisman, his gold cufflinks and binoculars.

For years Garnett's family believed he was one of the 80 airmen killed by von Richthofen, but now a descendant has pieced together the truth.

Garnett was returning from a morning patrol when he spotted two enemy Albatross aircraft. Without waiting for help, he broke away from his squadron and

attacked. Unluckily for him, the two all-red biplanes were from the baron's feared 11th Jasta (Pursuit) Squadron, flown by von Richthofen and Lieutenant Kurt Wolff. In the fierce dogfight which followed, Garnett was quickly outgunned and was shot down a mile behind the German lines.

His widow later married again, and her grandson, Mac Hawkins, 53, from Bridgwater, Somerset, has recently spent months re-

searching Garnett's death. He traced the German fighter squadron's records and found an entry for March 30, 1917: "One flight. Lieut Wolff successfully, at 11.45am near Fouquieries, this side of the lines, Nieuport DD one-seater. Inmate Lieut Garnett Killed."

Richthofen learnt of the dead man's recent marriage. Mr Hawkins believes, because Garnett may have survived long enough to speak of it. "He obviously

admired Pat's courage and wrote to my grandmother expressing his condolences. She took that to mean that he personally shot Pat down, but now it seems not."

Mr Hawkins added: "Not surprisingly, she destroyed the letter. She thought this chap had killed her husband, after all." Lieutenant Wolff was killed in September 1917, with 33 kills to his credit.

A 12ft crucifix erected in memory of Garnett, at St Andrew's Church in Backwell, near Bristol, has been restored and rededicated. Mr Hawkins uncovered the memorial, which had become overgrown, while researching his book on Somerset at war, and the family paid for it to be restored.

At the rededication service on Easter Saturday, the anniversary of Garnett's death, a bugler from the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment, the modern equivalent of his regiment, played the *Last Post*. 80 years almost to the minute after he was killed.



Patrick and Mary Garnett on their wedding day

Citizen's air force flies into the sunset

BY MICHAEL EVANS
DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT

THE RAF Volunteer Reserve, which had more than half a million members during the Second World War, is to be disbanded today. After 60 years the VR, as it is known, is to be amalgamated with the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.

Conceived in the mid-1930s by Marshal of the RAF Lord Tedder, the VR became a "citizen's air force". Clerks, students, teachers and engineers learnt to fly in the evening, after work, and at the weekend. By the time of the Battle of Britain in 1940, one in six of the RAF's officer corps came from the VR ranks. Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding, Commander-in-Chief of Fighter Command, once said: "Thank God for the RAFVR."

The volunteers included Johnnie Johnson, who went on to become Britain's foremost fighter pilot, shooting down 38 German aircraft in the Second World War; he retired as an air vice-marshal.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon, Chief of the Air Staff, paid tribute to the work of the VR and its part in RAF history. He added: "It seems entirely right that for the future we should have one reserve, bringing with it greater flexibility in terms of how it might be deployed." The new combined force is set to double in size to more than 3,000 personnel.

At today's ceremony at RAF Cranwell, which will be led by the Duke of York, Flight Lieutenant Howard Chandler, a Boeing 747 pilot with British Airways, will be among those joining a flypast at the controls of a Hercules transport aircraft.

Rejoice that the Church is human too

By John Hind

St Augustine wrote confidently of the Church: "We are the Easter people, and Alleluia is our song!" From the resurrection of Jesus, the Church emerged as God's sign and agent of the new life he willed for the entire world.

Despite the shortcomings of its members and some of the negative publicity the Church attracts, these days between Easter and Pentecost provide a particular focus for reflection on the nature and purpose of God's Easter people. It is important to keep emphasising the sense of new life and salvation at the heart of the Christian message, especially in the face of the cynical comment by a 19th-century critic that "Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, and what

wrong. "Institutional religion" has a bad name.

We live in an age in which institutions generally have a bad name. It is good that we are not as overawed by hierarchies, as in previous generations, and good that freedom of speech is welcomed, enabling hypocrisy to be exposed. But these goods can spill over into what has been called the "culture of contempt". We are in danger of considering cynicism a virtue.

The simple fact is that institutions will always be with us. They are part of the God-given way in which the world works. Because they work under human influences, they will be prone to distortion and sin. That does not invalidate them.

Christians believe that this world is not only made and sustained by God, but that it is restored and renewed by him. The flesh, meaning our earthly life, in all its aspects, may be weak but it is still capable of being the bearer of divinity. Human beings can be redeemed, and so too can their institutions.

In Easter week, Christians celebrate not only the resurrection of Jesus Christ but also our own share in his resurrection.

The Church — God's Easter people — is precisely one way in which the message of the Kingdom of God is embodied. No human individual, philosophy or institution is perfect, but here in the Church, there is a community that shares completely in the ambiguities of earthly life but is at the same time one with the world to come.

God's Easter people rejoice that even institutions can rise again — and again. "Alleluia" they sing, as they love this strange, mixed body of saints and sinners, in which life is a constant struggle but the joy of Heaven is a present reality as well as a future hope.

This is a way of looking at life which is good news indeed, not for religious interest groups, but for people everywhere struggling to make sense of a world in which the highest treasures are contained in earthly vessels.

John Hind is Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe.

Charity treasurer pocketed £109,000

BY A STAFF REPORTER

THE treasurer of a children's charity was jailed for 2½ years yesterday after admitting stealing £109,000 from it over ten years. Charles Atkinson, 39, a bank clerk, pocketed cash donations to the Church of England Children's Society or forged cheques for cash.

Atkinson, of St Margaret's Bay, near Dover, Kent, admitted 12 thefts and one forgery between July 1986 and February 1996. He asked for a further 320 offences to be considered. Judge David Croft, QC, said: "This reflects ten years of deception and dishonesty, lying to your colleagues on the committee and cheating children."

Maidstone Crown Court

was told that Atkinson's wife, a retired teacher, and his two children had no idea what he was up to. There was no lavish lifestyle and their most luxurious holidays were driving down to the South of France to stay at a friend's cottage.

Atkinson told police he did not know where the money had gone and had used it simply to support his family. Sometimes he would pocket up to £5,000 a month, banking coins from the charity's collections but keeping the notes.

He had been made treasurer because he was a senior clerical assistant at NatWest Bank in Canterbury. The bank has since reimbursed the charity for the full loss.

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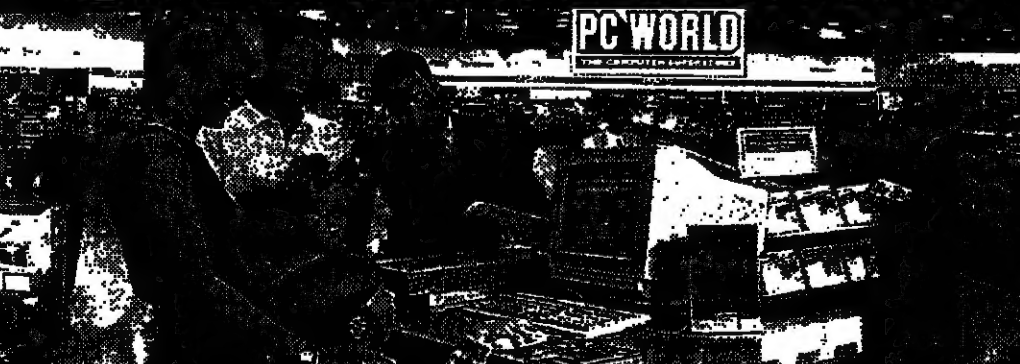
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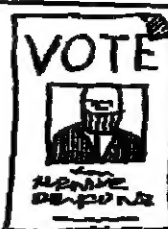
POLL DAY
-26

'John Major dropped into the Bugle to hoist a pint of warm ale with the anglers'

Charles Bremner - page 14



■ Lib Dems leap where Labour fears to tread
Peter Riddell - p13
■ Cherie Blair wins legal personality of the year award - p14
■ Who spent most in the poster war? - p 12



The dishonest agents
guide to cheating at
election expenses

Details - page 15

Searching out the true colours

JOE KLEIN sat looking at a new cast of characters yesterday, trying to work out the plot. One thing seemed certain. If the issue of tax in Scotland was the toughest question to be faced by Tony Blair, then there seemed little material for another best-selling novel on the scandalous intrigue behind modern politics.

Mr Klein is the American journalist who turned Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign into the novel *Primary Colors*, going behind the scenes on the election trail as aides struggled with their personal morality while trying to keep the sleazier issues off the agenda. Mr Klein is now the only foreign journalist to gain accreditation for the Blair campaign bus.

Yesterday he had his first taste of the Blair campaign with the colourful spectacle of the Scottish press, red in tooth and claw, giving the Labour leader a severe grilling over devolution. As the candidate gave identical answers to the same questions, as if caught in



Ben Macintyre watches as an author finds the gap between American and British politics is like that between fact and fiction - a little narrower every day

an endless argumentative loop, the American writer professed some bafflement as to what, precisely, was going on.

"He just won't mention the possibility of a raise in taxes. Right?" Mr Klein wondered, as the press conference on Labour's Scottish manifesto drew to an ill-tempered close.

Mr Klein, now on assignment for *New Yorker* magazine, was a senior political correspondent for *Newsweek* when, under the name "Anonymous", he published *Primary Colors*, initially denying he was the author. It is to be made into a film starring John Travolta and Kristin Scott Thomas as the candidate and

his wife. Yesterday Mr Klein said he thought it unlikely that his experiences on the Labour campaign trail would form the basis for another novel, although he added wryly: "I'm not going to foreclose on anything."

First, however, he had to sort out the cast of British characters: "Who's that?" Mr Klein asked, as Alistair Campbell, Mr Blair's press secretary offered the day's spin. That, it was explained, is Labour's taller answer to George Stephanopoulos, the pin-up wunderkind of the Democrats' 1992 campaign and believed to be the model for the main protagonist in *Primary Colors*.

The careful Blair campaign could be etched only in more muted and undramatic tones. While Mr Blair was forced into some fancy footwork on the West Lothian question, he is no John Travolta.

The last time I met Mr Klein was on a campaign swing with Mr Clinton through the state of Georgia, at an event which involved two brass bands, an open-air stadium, massed ranks of cheerleaders and thousands of balloons. The Blair campaign found itself yesterday afternoon at the Kingsgrove community hall in Staffordshire. This featured one working lavatory, several gallons of strong tea, and 400 locals in a question and an-



Tony Blair in action on the Scottish question yesterday: some fancy moves, but at least he will never be played by John Travolta

swer session with Mr Blair. But while the setting may have been very different, the Blair '97 campaign clearly shows the influence of two successive Democrat campaigns, including slick media handling, snappy sloganeering and an emphasis on carefully coordi-

nated and photo-friendly people-contact.

The Staffordshire "town meeting" was the sort of set-piece event Clinton employed to great effect: the first-name terms, the earnest sincerity, the overwhelmingly enthusiastic audience and the buzz-

words - "trust", "hope" - were all leaves taken from the Clinton book.

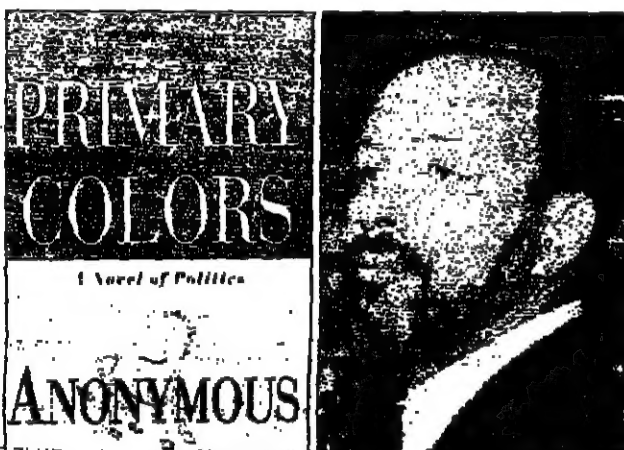
The Victoria Hall in Kingsgrove was specifically selected to contrast with what the Labour spinners declared would be the "glitz and triumphalism" of John Ma-

ior's rally at the Albert Hall in London.

As the latest round of low-calibre chicken jokes was exchanged between the waiting journalists, Mr Klein pointed out that this was another idea that had travelled the Atlantic to enter the British election

campaign. He asked: "Is this the first time you've had animals?"

"It's nice to be here for a breakthrough. You should have been with us in Missouri in 1988. An entire barnyard menagerie turned up to confront Michael Dukakis."



The bestseller and the man who initially denied that he wrote it: *Primary Colors* and Joe Klein

Blair puts Scottish backs up in rush to reassure English

Tony Blair and Stephen Dorrell are rather similar: mid-forties, Oxford-educated, politically ambitious, formed by Westminster and mudlud on Scotland.

Neither seems able to understand that what matters when speaking to the Scots is not what you say, but how you say it. Both made the mistake of assuming that, whatever power may be devolved to Scotland, Westminster will always have the right to revoke it. Whatever logic they thought they were demonstrating, both were guilty of political ineptitude.

Mr Dorrell stated last February that a future Tory government could always abolish a Scottish parliament. Mr Blair said that whatever a Scottish parliament decided, ultimate sovereignty would rest with him as an English MP. Even Michael Forsyth, the Scottish Secretary, does not believe that Mr Blair's remarks were at best ill-judged, at worst simply wrong. Devolving power to Scotland means just that - giving it power that cannot simply be removed by a vote in Westminster.

The Claim of Right document, signed by Labour as one of the partners of the Scottish Constitutional Con-

vention, acknowledges as its central thesis "the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government best suited to their needs". It adds that, in all its actions, "their needs shall be paramount".

Most of the convention's deliberations have been aimed at defining the best way of enshrining that right. To erode it by playing around with words at this stage, as Mr Blair did yesterday, is to risk Labour's credibility on the one issue in Scotland on which they should be unequivocal. This, he should have realised, is thoroughly dangerous territory.

It is a measure of their collective misjudgment that both Mr Dorrell and Mr Blair chose a Scottish newspaper to voice views that were intended for English ears. Mr Blair is concerned to reassure his English candidates that nothing in Labour's devolution plans will undermine the Parliament to which they hope to be elected. He went out of his way to state that whatever plans a Scottish parliament might put forward, ultimate sovereignty would reside with Westminster.

That statement is constitutionally correct and, if he had stopped there, no damage would have been done. Not



MAGNUS LINKLATER

even the convention is proposing a federal solution in which the two parliaments in London and Edinburgh would have equal status. But at the same time it is vital that those rights Westminster does cede to Scotland should be enshrined, and that includes Labour's tax-varying powers. Try as he might, Mr Blair cannot pretend to control his own affairs and on the other that it can always be revoked.

Equally, his choice of words could not have been worse. To say that sovereignty rests "with me as an English MP" is to suggest an authoritarian attitude that Scottish voters

will immediately associate with Baroness Thatcher's *de haut en bas* pronouncements that used regularly to get up their noses. And to say, as he did, that the right to raise income tax is no more than that held by an English parish council - which is technically true - is simply condescending and insulting.

How great then is the damage? Not fundamental, perhaps, but certainly destabilising to Labour's campaign in Scotland. It will reinforce the widely perceived notion that Mr Blair is unconvinced about the wisdom of devolution and that he is more concerned with his English voters.

Perhaps more important, it runs directly counter to his repeated entreaty yesterday: trust me. That trust had already been undermined by Labour's decision to hold a two-question referendum on devolution rather than simply introduce legislation for a Scottish parliament once elected. This latest gaffe will give further ammunition, not just to the other parties in Scotland, but to those hitherto silenced members of the old Labour Party in Scotland who may well conclude that new Labour is having second thoughts about its flagship policy.

The Stamina Factor

John Major: 54

Freshness rating: ★★★★★

Miles travelled this week: 820

Hours spent campaigning on the streets: 7%

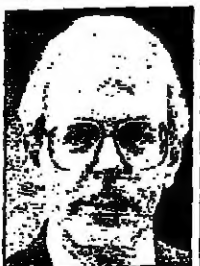
Interviews: Average 10 per day

Press conferences: 3

Manifesto launches: 1

Average working day: 18 hours

Worst moment: Nearly losing his temper with John Humphrys of Today when repeatedly questioned about sleaze on Wednesday



Tony Blair: 43

Freshness rating: ★★★★★

Miles travelled this week: 2000

Hours spent campaigning on the streets: 7

Interviews: Average 10 per day

Press conferences: 4

Manifesto launches: 2

Average working day: 12 hours

Worst moment: Facing the Scottish press yesterday after comparing a devolved Scottish parliament to a parish council



Paddy Ashdown: 56

Freshness rating: ★★★★★

Miles travelled this week: 1453

Hours spent campaigning on the streets: 10%

Interviews: Average 10 per day

Press conferences: 3

Manifesto launches: 1

Average working day: 16½ hours

Worst moment: Finding his manifesto contradicted itself on tax yesterday



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Connections
by Graham

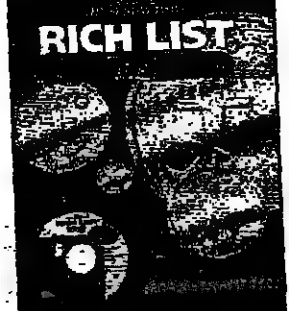
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Norma's husband fishes for votes by the river

THERE was no cricket match in sight but eternal England was on show yesterday when John Major dropped into the Bugle pub on the Hamble to hoist a pint of warm ale with the anglers.

Through the window of the 12th-century pub, beyond the BMWs and Volvos on the old car park, a forest of masts on the river testified to the age-old pursuits of the English. Just the backdrop for a day of messing about near boats, setting course for the future and pursuing the floating voter. Inside the Bugle, packed with "yachties", the media and security men, the Prime Minister was the complete man-in-the-pub when he dropped in to surprise the locals.

Letting his double-breasted suit flap open and manfully eschewing the tankard's handle, the former Brixton lad sipped his Bass only a little too delicately as he lent a sympathetic ear to the fears of his fishermen friends: that despite Labour's backing away this week from giving parliamentary time to banning fox-hunting, a Blair government would eventually

When John Major sought a quiet pint in a waterside pub, Charles Bremner and the world's media just happened to be there



move from foxes to fish and rob them of their sport.

No, the fishing lobby had not formally teamed up with the hunters, but "it's only a short step from fox-hunting to other things," said Jerry Hall, the angler-in-chief. Mr Major assured them of the Tories' love of their sport and invited them to visit his Huntingdonshire fishpond — without their rods.

Mr Hall, it transpired, was also a local Conservative activist, whose aid had been solicited by Central Office in a day that offered a textbook case of the manufactured media opportunity that has become the hallmark of Campaign 1997.

Mr Major's unannounced descent by Boeing 737 on the picturesque mecca of yachting

was hardly a hard day on the hustings, even though Mrs Major's handlers, one wearing a badge proclaiming "Re-elect Norma's Husband", fretted that their lady had been upset by the scrum of media that crowded the lane.

But there was a point to the outing. The Hamble falls in Hampshire's Eastleigh constituency, lost by the Tories to the Liberal Democrats after the death of Stephen Milligan in 1994. If the Conservatives are to have any hope, they must win back such traditionally true-blue seats.

Standing windswept on the quayside, halyards clinking on masts behind him, Mr Major implicitly recognised the struggle he faces with the floating voter. The polls were rubbish, he insisted. "The

don't-knows are Conservatives who are waiting for the right reason to come home to the Conservative Party ... I expect that they will need a bit of wooing but I think and hope that they will come home and that we will win the election."

Few yacht owners were there to hear the Prime Minister's thoughts because it was only Friday lunchtime and they are mostly what the locals know as DFTs, or Down From Towners.

The diffidence and civility of his nautical jaunt was too much for one American correspondent observing the gentler English art of campaigning. "What is this all about?" he wondered. "This is a totally substance-free day and I paid £520 for it."

The big parties' practice of hitting journalists with some of the world's steepest charges for media access and travel is prompting signs of mutiny from foreign news people. "They started at £570 for the day," grumbled Patrice de Beer, *Le Monde's* London correspondent. "We had to haggle to get it down to this extortionate level."



Seeking five more years before the mast: Mr and Mrs Major on the Hamble

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QANTAS BRITISH AIRWAYS

Thatcher meeting to boost morale

BY ANDREW PIERCE

JOHN MAJOR and Baroness Thatcher will speak on the same platform tomorrow for the first time since the last general election.

At a rally of candidates at Conservative Central Office, the Prime Minister by her side, Lady Thatcher will forcefully attack Labour, in a rare show of solidarity with her successor. The appearance of unity will conceal tensions at Central Office over the role of Brian Mawhinney, the party chairman, who has been virtually sidelined from the media campaign. With the Tories still way behind Labour in the opinion polls, the joint appear-

Hospital chiefs face sack in red tape blitz

BY JILL SHERMAN

HEALTH authority chiefs will face heavy financial penalties and could be sacked under a Labour government if they fail to cut down on bureaucratic waste, Tony Blair will announce today.

Mr Blair will use his adoption speech at Sedgfield to present a new scheme to crack down on unnecessary paperwork and administration in NHS trusts to save money for patient care. League tables would be set up to show which of the 450 NHS trusts in Britain are the most efficient.

All hospitals would be expected to improve their standards to match the best 25 per

THE TORY CAMPAIGN

ance by the two will provide a much-needed morale boost for the Tory campaign team.

One of Lady Thatcher's supporters said last night: "She is absolutely on side. She is absolutely committed to a Conservative victory. If we were to lose there is no way she wants to be exposed to criticism that her conduct was a contributory factor."

Friends of Dr Mawhinney have complained that he has been overshadowed in the campaign by Michael Heseltine and Kenneth Clarke. Dr Mawhinney has been virtually consigned to a backroom role and to regional tours.

Apart from at Wednesday's launch of the manifesto, he has rarely been seen or heard. He had agreed before the campaign to a downgrading of his media role because of a perception that he is less effective than the Deputy Prime Minister. But he is becoming restless that other Cabinet figures have been making more of the running. His exclusion has led to reports of tension in the Tories' communications department.

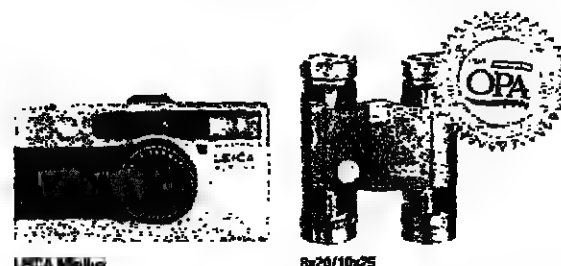
LABOUR CAMPAIGN

cent. Those that failed would be visited by hit squads who would carry out quality audits to investigate where administrative and management costs could be reduced.

If the hospital refused to implement these recommendations, the chief executive would lose the performance related element of his pay. Chief executives can earn more than £100,000, of which more than 10 per cent can be in performance bonuses. If this penalty was also ignored, the chairman and/or the non-executive members of the trust, who are appointed by the Secretary of State, could be dismissed.

Mr Blair has already pledged to save £100 million from administrative waste. But today he will make clear that he has far bigger savings in mind, with plans to appoint a new independent "bureaucracy buster" to look at management costs within the NHS. This role, answerable to the Health Secretary, would involve identifying waste and drawing up guidelines for hospitals.

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Women rivals sharpen their claws

Daniel McGrory witnesses insults flying as the battle for Peterborough gets off to a hostile start

AFTER the mock battles between chickens it was a day for genuine confrontation as the rival women of Peterborough bared claws and traded insults on a street corner.

By unhappy coincidence the Conservative candidate Jacqueline Foster and her Labour opponent, Helen Brinton, chose the same time to visit the anniversary celebrations of a community association held in the impossibly crowded front room of a terraced house in the constituency.

Guests were elbowing aside as both women expertly pirouetted in the confined space to ensure they did not have to shake hands, exchange pleasantries nor be photographed together watched over by the city's mayor.

Labour likes to portray Miss Foster, 45, a British Airways stewardess, as trained to calm the nervous traveller — in this case Peterborough's runaway MP Brian Mawhinney, the Tory Party chairman who they accuse of fleeing to a safe seat in next door Cambridge.

"Brian Mawhinney is the biggest chicken in the coop. He has done Labour a huge favour by sending a message that Peterborough is unwinnable for his party so Miss Foster has been sent to hold his hand," Miss Brinton said. The formidable Miss Foster retorted that her opponent is a "hypocrite as she gets paid as a teacher at a grant-



Jacqueline Foster, left, the Tory candidate, and her Labour rival Helen Brinton at the constituency yesterday

maintained school and her lot wants to abolish them."

The rivals' next exchange was over their commitment to the city with Miss Foster pointing out she has at least lived in Peterborough long enough to appear on the electoral roll unlike her oppo-

nent, who she says "lives in Kent and has only just rented a flat for the duration of this campaign". She added: "There is no love lost between us. I do not respect her. She just mouths what Tony Blair tells her to. If she wants to debate me I will go anywhere, any

time, any place." Unashamedly, she describes Baroness Thatcher as "my absolute political role model" and admits: "I have always been tough. I tried 23 constituencies before I got this place. I am a divorcee with no children which some Tory as-

sociations do not care for. I am not bitter about that but then I have never been politically correct. What I am though is the best man for this job. "I do not need to be told how to dress or how to act like those Labour lady clones, Tony's Spice Girls." She in-

sists her choice of outfit — a well-cut two-piece blue suit — is her normally preferred style. "I always like to be neat and smart."

Apart from a spell living abroad she has been a stewardess since 1971 and warns she will "do damage" to anyone who makes sneering remarks about her being a "troll doll".

Her combative streak is needed if the Conservatives are to hold onto this city after boundary changes left the Tories with a notional majority of under 5,000 and a council that recently went to Labour with an 18 per cent swing.

Labour has already had two Cabinet ministers drop into Peterborough this week which is testament to how much effort they are putting in to win this constituency.

Ms Brinton, a 42-year-old mother of two, said as she swept off from the Gladstone Road Association. "The Tories are so scared all they can do is throw insults."

Miss Foster's reply was predictably swift and venomous. "I debate issues and all she does is read a script but if she wants this to be ugly so be it. She will not win."

Mohammad Choudhary, the Mayor, watching this shook his head and said: "I think we are in for a real scrap. I like both ladies though I am a Labour councillor, but may the best man win."

THE CAMPAIGN IN SCOTLAND

Why the press is reluctant to rave for Blair



Tony Blair discovers few allies and fierce independence in a Scottish press leaning towards nationalism, says Michael Gove

TONY BLAIR discovered yesterday that the Scottish press is no friend of his, nor should it be expected to be after his derogatory off-the-cuff remark about Scottish journalists last year.

But there is another reason for the Scottish press's suspicion of Mr Blair. The Scottish media has grown more autonomous from London in recent years, just as Mr Blair has reduced the independence of the Scottish Labour Party by having activists who take a different line removed from its executive and having Scottish candidates selected in London.

Since the decision by *The Sun* to publish a full Scottish edition, newspapers north of the border have striven harder to show their own Scottish colours.

Both the *Mail* and the *Express* have increased their Scottish staff and editorial content, as has *The Times*. In response, the papers previously closest to the Scottish grain, Edinburgh's *Scotsman*, the *Glasgow Herald*, and the *Daily Record*, have had to fight harder to assert their distinctiveness. *The Scotsman* and the *Herald* have responded by taking a more detached line towards new Labour even as England seems to embrace Mr Blair's party.

The *Herald* has positioned itself to the left of new Labour, and its editorial yesterday was sniffy about Mr Blair locating himself in the "radical centre" of politics, concluding that "Labour's manifesto may well deserve to win an election but whether it will win the longer-term affection of the British people is quite a different matter."

The *Scotsman*, with Andrew Neil as its Editor-in-

Chief, now occupies a space which is still on the left but at a critical distance from new Labour. Since taking over, Neil has laid into Labour's devolution plans, arguing in the words of yesterday's editorial, that "the fact that devolution is a good idea does not mean that every devolution scheme is without blemish. Labour persists in offering a flawed scheme — and one that could still easily be repaired — and it still refuses to answer the West Lothian question. Are we supposed to applaud?"

On the opposing page, *The Scotsman's* main political commentator, Ian McWhirter, continues the assault, arguing: "Even when we look at Labour's specific deliverable promises we find that, where they are not banal, they come apart."

Even on newspapers committed to new Labour, there is resistance. Many on the Scottish *Sun*, which bore a front-page endorsement of Mr Blair yesterday, were reluctant recruits. The paper was a cheer leader for the Scottish National Party from January, 1992, until the day after the English *Sun* shone on Blair. Even now, some of its staffers prefer nationalism to new Labour.

Its main rival, *The Daily Record*, has always been loyal to Labour, but preferred yesterday to lead on a scratch-card winner's good fortune than Labour's historic manifesto.

Most of Scotland's newspapers will still probably back Mr Blair come polling day, partly in order to secure the separate Parliament so many of them support. But if he disappoints in Downing Street, they will be back to give him going over.

Pact is still on, say Lib Dems

BY MAGNUS LINKLATER

TONY BLAIR was accused yesterday of undermining the agreement between Labour and Liberal Democrats in Scotland over the creation of a Scottish parliament.

Launching the Liberal Democrat manifesto in Edinburgh, Jim Wallace, the party's Scottish leader, said there was a basic contradiction between the claim of right document that both parties had signed in the Scottish Constitutional Convention and remarks by Mr Blair published in *The Scotsman* yesterday.

"Mr Blair seems to be departing from the line that I thought Labour MPs had signed up to when they signed the claim of right," Mr Wallace said. He stopped short, however, of saying that Mr Blair had destroyed the pact between

the two parties over a Scottish parliament. It remained real and not a sham partnership, he said. But there did seem to be a difference in emphasis. The Liberal Democrats had a "gut belief" in the parliament, which was not shared by new Labour.

This underlined the importance of electing "large numbers" of Liberal Democrats to Westminster. He said their manifesto was the only one "carefully thought out and fully costed" and it would make a real difference to the future of Scotland. The party intended to invest £1 billion in Scottish education by the year 2002, providing pre-school education for all three and four-year-olds and reducing the size of all primary classes to below 30.

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Ashdown P
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Leader: apology



THE SUNDAY
PRIME MIN
QUESTION



Ashdown plays honesty card with 'tax and spend' proposals

Jill Sherman and Polly Newton report on the Liberal Democrat manifesto

THE Liberal Democrat manifesto, published yesterday, is the most radical of the party documents produced this week, with an ambitious programme of increased public spending, funded in part by an increase of 1p in the basic rate of income tax.

Presenting his party's manifesto, the Liberal Democrat leader claimed that only his party was bold enough to admit that public services could not be improved unless taxes went up. He promised 10,000 extra nurses, 3,000 extra policemen, £2 billion more spent on education, free eye and dental checks and shorter hospital waiting-lists.

"We've got to break the fatalism in our politics. We've got to get this country's 'can-do' spirit back, and there is nothing we cannot achieve," he said.

The Liberal Democrats say that education is their top priority. The age from which local authorities are required to provide schooling would be reduced from five down to three, although attendance at nursery school from three years old would not be compulsory. No child between five and 11 would need to be in a class of more than 30 pupils. There would be extra spending on school books and equipment and on the repair of school buildings.

But soon after the manifesto was published, there was confusion over how much extra tax people would have to pay.



Paddy Ashdown yesterday, delivering his message that a Liberal Democrat vote was not a wasted vote.

The document claims that its proposals would cost taxpayers an average of only 45p per week, a point immediately disputed by the Tories. But Mr Ashdown later admitted that the average earner on £19,000 a week would pay nearer £1.23 a week, and higher earners would pay much more.

Mr Ashdown also had difficulty explaining why one section of his party's document suggests that there will be tax cuts for 95.5 per cent of income taxpayers, which appears to contradict other sections.

Under the overall tax changes, those earning more than £100,000 would face a new top rate of tax of 50p. The basic rate of tax would also go up by a penny from 23p to 24p.

to meet the increased spending on education.

But the party also intends to take 500,000 low earners out of income tax by raising tax thresholds by £200 to £4,245. This would be paid for by the new 50p tax rate for high

age taxpayer would pay an extra £2.40 a week.

There was also confusion over the party's plans to phase out National Insurance contributions, as part of pension reforms. Alan Beith, the deputy leader, said: "We will start

ance charges were combined with income tax.

The document includes pledges to increase annual spending on health by £265 million and pensions by £265 million a year. It proposes to put 5p on a packet of cigarettes to pay for the restoration of free eye and dental checks and to freeze prescription charges.

Mr Ashdown said a Liberal Democrat vote was "not a wasted vote if you want more investment in your kid's school, if you want more investment to solve the crisis in the hospitals. A Liberal Democrat vote is the only vote you have got."

Leading article, page 21

The Liberal Democrat manifesto will appear in full on Monday

earners. Mr Ashdown later said that while those earning less than £12,000 would pay less tax, those earning more than £12,000 would pay more. Someone on £38,000 a year would pay an additional £2.70 in tax each week.

Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, claimed that the aver-

to phase out the expensive, unfair contributory system and base the right to a state pension on citizenship and residence." Having denied that this meant tax rises, Mr Beith eventually conceded that the policy could lead to a 10p increase in income tax "in the long term", as National Insur-

Lib Dems leap in where Labour fears to tread

The Liberal Democrat manifesto, *Make the Difference*, is something completely different, as John Clee, a prominent supporter, might have said. But then the party is not playing the same electoral game as the Tories or Labour.

It is not competing for national power, but rather seeking influence by aiming for a few dozen, mainly Tory-held, seats. The question raised by yesterday's manifesto is whether a self-consciously radical, bold programme peppered with commitments to initiatives everywhere is the right way to win over disillusioned Tories.

Where "new" Labour is afraid to tread, Paddy Ashdown delights in leaping. He is not afraid to talk about the need to raise taxes to pay for smaller classes, new books and equipment for schools, nursery education for three and four-year-olds, and reduced health service waiting lists and more doctors and nurses. This candour is refreshing compared with the evasions of the other parties. But its appeal is likely to be limited, though not quite as small as the cynics suggest.

Parents are alarmed at the cutbacks in schools, teachers being laid off and the fund-raising drives for new equipment. Some people may be prepared to pay a little more in tax for better public services. This ties in with the Liberal Democrats' parallel campaign for the forgotten



PETER RIDDELL

elections on May 1, those outside London and the big cities for control of the county councils.

The danger with such costly programmes, as Labour found five years ago, is that everyone can pick apart the details: how many will pay more in tax, and how much? Who will benefit? Mr Ashdown and his colleagues had an uncomfortable few minutes yesterday giving answers — which explains why Gordon Brown has been so critical of the Liberal Democrat stance and avoided such promises himself.

The risk for the Liberal Democrats has always been that they will be squeezed by Labour's strength and move to the centre. The continued high Labour ratings in the polls have led to a shift in the Liberal Democrats' strategy. There is no longer any talk of what might happen in a

hung parliament, and the issue of electoral reform was not exactly being highlighted yesterday.

The party has been distancing itself from Labour, and from any hint of post-election deals, emphasising its distinctive approach and contrast with Labour's caution. If, by late April, Labour looks as if it is heading for a landslide, we will probably hear more about the need for an independent party pressing for better schools and so on.

The party needs to retain national visibility to reinforce its regional activities, but it is not yet making headway in the national polls, being stuck around 11 to 14 per cent. Party strategists argue that this is no guide to their core 50 target seats where they are running strongly and, more to the point, a majority believe the Liberal Democrats are the main challenger.

On this view, the Tories are so weak that it does not matter that Labour is currently ten points or so ahead of its 1992 share in these seats. This is a fine balance. The Liberal Democrats cannot afford too strong a showing by Labour in these seats, or else Tory candidates will squeak back in on a lower share of the vote. The party cannot just fight a local and regional campaign. It needs to remain in the national picture. Yesterday's manifesto launch shows how hard it is for the Liberal Democrats to be both radical and credible.

Leaders' apologies cannot hide their delight at being squeezed



MATTHEW PARRIS

PADDY ASHDOWN has hit on a foolproof way of packing Liberal Democrat meetings: hire a small hall. At Church House near Westminster yesterday, in a room probably more modest than the dining room of his campaign supremo, Lord Holme of Cheltenham, a few score journalists jostled with Lord Holme's ego for space in which to breathe.

"I am sorry it's so crowded," drawled the noble lord in accents which suggested that even his broom cupboard was bigger. "Thanks for coming," the ever-money Paddy Ashdown said. "Sorry we're over-crowded." His grin showed that he was not sorry. On

one wall Archbishop Cosmo Lang glared from his oil painting as a microphone on a pole teetered perilously close to his Most Reverend nose, the mike's beaver toning below.

Mr Ashdown spoke, his eyes driven by passion and grit into steely slits. A summary of his words, with bullet-points, was projected onto granite behind him. It was only screen granite. The impression was of receiving a poor man's version of the Ten Commandments from a poor man's version of Moses. Once enunciated, each covenant on the screen degraded — broke up in a computer-simulated snowstorm — and disappeared. Perhaps we were

being prepared for the real world, post-May 1, and the politicians' golden calves.

There were questions. Andrew Ramsley of *A Week In Politics* pointed out that Mr Ashdown had promised to raise income tax, and Mr Blair had promised not to, and both had promised to co-operate. Whose promise, then, was he promising to see broken? Mr Ashdown said it depended on how many votes he got.

The impression was confusing. Confusion deepened when Anthony Bevins of *The Independent* said: "Turn to page 49 of your manifesto. Look at it because it's rubbish." Everyone scrambled for the page.

Bevins and Ashdown squabbled about what seemed to be the implication on the page that taxes would go down when on other pages Ashdown had said that they would go up. Bevins demanded a reprint.

"Ah," Ashdown's helpful deputy interrupted, "but now turn to page 61." Everyone did so. Here, said Alan Beith, it explained that although the measures on page 49 brought taxes down, the measures on page 61 brought them up again. Ah!

Confusion deepened further when *The Guardian's* Michael White said that a Liberal Democrat advertisement in *New Statesman & Society*

claimed that taxes would rise by as much as 60p per week. "That was a misprint," Lord Holme said. "And not even a *Guardian* misprint," the owlish Beith chuckled.

The whole occasion was taking on an *Alice in Wonderland* quality. Had the Tory chicken, the *Mirror* fox, the two placard-carrying bears and the South African rhinoceros now swung from the ceiling on trapezes, to add their own ironic comment on the trivialisation of politics, few would have raised an eyebrow. Archbishop Lang stared stonily from his frame.

On Wednesday, John Major unveiled a manifesto which, though not devoid of ideas, breathes cau-

tion. His whole campaign insinuates a single theme: "So far so good: don't risk change." On Thursday, Labour's communications teamsters took us aside before their manifesto launch to remind us that there was nothing novel or interesting at all in the document. Tony Blair actually said — or implied — it was all old hat.

To calm me before the launch of his own party's plans, the Liberal Democrat MEP Graham Watson took me aside to tell me: "There's nothing new in them."

All three parties creep around, whispering into every anxious ear: "Don't worry: we have nothing to say." They crouch to conquer.

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Cherie Booth named legal personality of the year

By RICHARD FORD, HOME CORRESPONDENT

CHERIE BOOTH broke off campaigning with her husband in Scotland yesterday after learning she had been named Legal Personality of the Year. Tony Blair's wife travelled to London to receive the award last night.

She was named the winner after lawyers throughout Britain had voted in a contest organised by *The Lawyer* newspaper. Mark Wyatt, the paper's publisher, said Ms Booth had won by a "substantial margin".

However, he refused to disclose any voting figures or

Booth only got so many." He said that Ms Booth, who became a QC two years ago, had won the award, a foot square bronze and brass plaque, by an "overwhelming margin". She had deserved the award because she was "juggling career with a very public profile and trying to bring up a family. She is a very good role model."

Suspensions about the voting were fuelled when staff at the weekly paper, which Mr Wyatt said sold 18,500 copies, disclosed that it had been inundated with votes and that the response from the legal profession had been bigger than in previous years.

Mr Wyatt said he did not think the competition had been rigged and that Ms Booth was a very popular figure who had had a high profile throughout the year. "Lawyers are very honourable people. There would be no skulduggery by any people involved, at least I hope not," he said.

Mr Wyatt was not even able to disclose the number of people nominated for the award. However, he said the list had included Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, Lord Bingham of Cornhill, the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Mackay of Clashfern, the Lord Chancellor, Michael Beloff, joint head of the chambers where Ms Booth works, Dame Barbara Mills, Director of Public Prosecutions, Anthony Julius, the solicitor who acted for Diana, Princess of Wales, during her divorce, and Lord Irvine of Lairg, a close friend of Ms Booth and her husband.

Lord Lester of Herne Hill, the civil liberties lawyer, said he knew nothing about the competition. When told he had been nominated, he said: "Really? I can only assume it was an April Fool. I am amazed I was nominated."



Booth received award from a trade paper

THE LAWYER

who was the runner-up in the competition, which was first held three years ago. The previous winners were Lord Woolf, the Master of the Rolls, and Martin Mears, the former President of the Law Society.

Mr Wyatt said: "We have never given figures. It is not a stitch-up, but giving figures gets very complicated and very embarrassing for the people nominated. It would become a story that Lord Mackay got this number of nominations or that Cherie



Facing the future: Mr Prescott helps James Bell, 4, from Cardiff, to recreate his pose with Tony Blair in the Labour Party manifesto

Labour's Welsh dragon comes home

Valerie Elliott joins a glum John Prescott on his manifesto launch in Cardiff

WHEN John Prescott appeared in Cardiff yesterday to launch Labour's Welsh manifesto, it seemed a less-than-happy homecoming for a son of Wales. Perhaps it was being in the south, far from his Prestatyn birthplace, or maybe it was getting his tongue around the dragon-like phrase *Llafur newydd* — new Labour.

Perhaps he did not relish promoting a manifesto that included a version in Welsh, with even a message from Tony Blair in the language, which he could not understand. Or it could have been just an uncomfortable night in his Cardiff hotel.

Whatever the reason, the man who would be Deputy Prime Minister in a Labour government was decidedly glum as he teamed up with his old Labour chums from the Welsh party. But he surely must have been cheered by the manifesto's promise that the principally would have a minister for children, an innovation which looks

set to be denied to youngsters in the rest of the country.

Mr Prescott added another promise, that a Labour government would hold a referendum this autumn on creating a Welsh assembly. But he vigorously defended Labour's decision not to give it tax-raising powers.

Talk of devolution was tricky to deal with yesterday after Tony Blair's local difficulty in Scotland. Unsurprisingly, after less than an hour Mr Prescott bowed out. He will be back in Wales next week but for the moment he seemed pleased that his battle bus was heading for the less challenging territory of Bolton.

He left Ron Davies, Shadow Welsh Secretary, to dismiss talk of splits in the Welsh Labour Party. It is clear, however, that many Labour MPs are not keen on the idea of an assembly. But after much arm-twisting they have promised not to cause trouble. Only Ulew Smith, MP for Blaenau

Gwent, remains implacably hostile and has written pamphlets opposing the move.

The other main detractor, Allan Rogers, MP for Rhondda, was convinced that an assembly would weaken local government. But he has agreed to work constructively with the party leadership and is writing a report for Mr Davies on how local authorities could benefit from the reform.

The main problem now is that three Labour MPs oppose any form of proportional representation in electing the assembly. Denzil Davies, former Treasury Minister and the MP for Llanelli, said yesterday: "I have always supported a Welsh assembly. I campaigned for it in 1978, but PR is a constitutional issue. We are entitled to express our reservations on it."

His views are shared by Ted Rowlands (Merthyr, Tŷfîl and

Rhymney) and Sir Ray Powell (Ogmore). They have privately come to a deal with the leadership that they will not vote against the second reading of a devolution Bill but they will speak against PR in Commons debates.

Ron Davies yesterday brushed aside the division. "When the legislation is put before the Commons, I expect full support from each and every Labour MP. It is a matter of constitutional propriety." He is convincing and seems determined to get his way. This was demonstrated by his grip on the Welsh manifesto, where he was allowed to include detailed policy instead of broad statements. His plan for a minister for children means that one person in the Welsh Office would take charge of all issues affecting the young, from health to education. Mr Davies also promised yesterday a rural policy for Wales.

Labour 'chuffed' by sale of BR

Richard Branson, Britain's second-largest rail operator, claimed that Labour was secretly pleased that the Tories had sold off British Rail.

The businessman, who met Tony Blair in private only six weeks ago, said a Labour government would never have dared to sell off the network for fear of incurring the wrath of the Left. "I believe that secretly, they are quite relieved it's happened. I therefore don't think they'll do much to rock the boat." He also told *Railway magazine*: "We can work with Labour."

Tory beaten up

Stuart Andrew, 25-year-old Conservative candidate in the safe Labour seat of Wrexham, was beaten unconscious by a gang shouting anti-Tory slogans in Beaumaris, Anglesey. His father Andrew, 52, had his skull fractured when he went to his aid.

Monster struggle

The Official Monster Raving Loony Party is struggling to field the 50 candidates it requires to qualify for a party political broadcast on television. Party leaders, who have 40 candidates, admit that they have no idea what message they would convey.

Sacré Blair

The flagship newspaper of the French Right, *Le Figaro*, heaped praise on Tony Blair on Friday for not promising too much in his ten-point "contract with the people" for pledging not to increase income tax and to freeze public spending for two years.

Election turn-off

Viewers have deserted the BBC's *Nine O'Clock News* since it doubled in length to provide extra time for election coverage. According to unofficial figures, 4.3 million people watched Wednesday's news, finishing at 10pm, compared with an average of six million.

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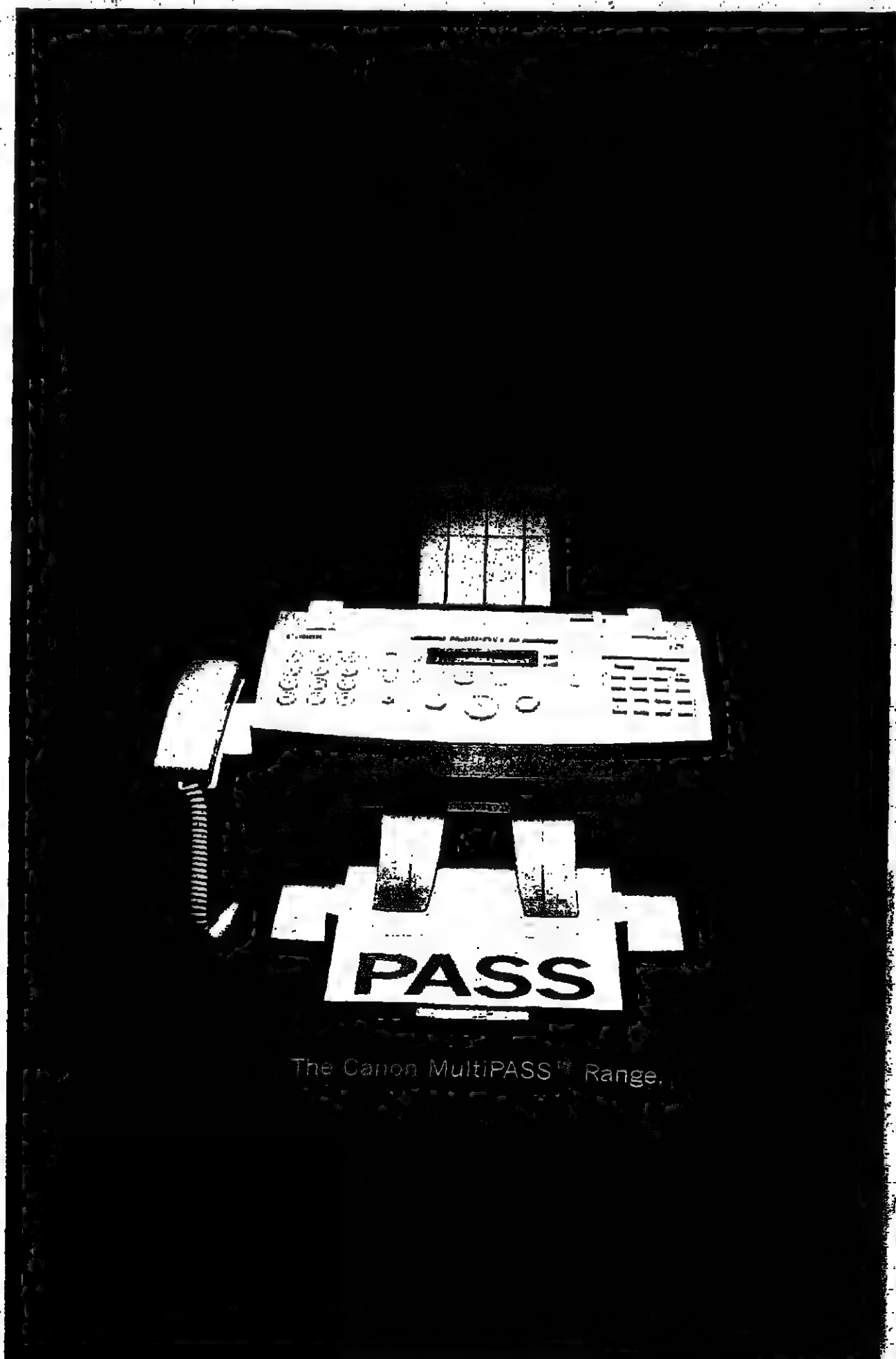
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Dominic Kennedy and Valerie Elliott describe ruses which help some candidates to steal a march

How parties cook the books on poll expenses

THE British electoral system is the envy of the world: to stop a rich man buying his way into Parliament, the law prevents a candidate spending more than about 7p on wooing each voter.

Expense returns have to be submitted after polling and are open to inspection. They must be within limits of about £3,300 for a typical seat.

In the marginal constituencies which decide each election, however, the parties bend the rules. Although the punishments are harsh, including a £5,000 fine, a ban on voting and on sitting as an MP, the chances of being caught are slim.

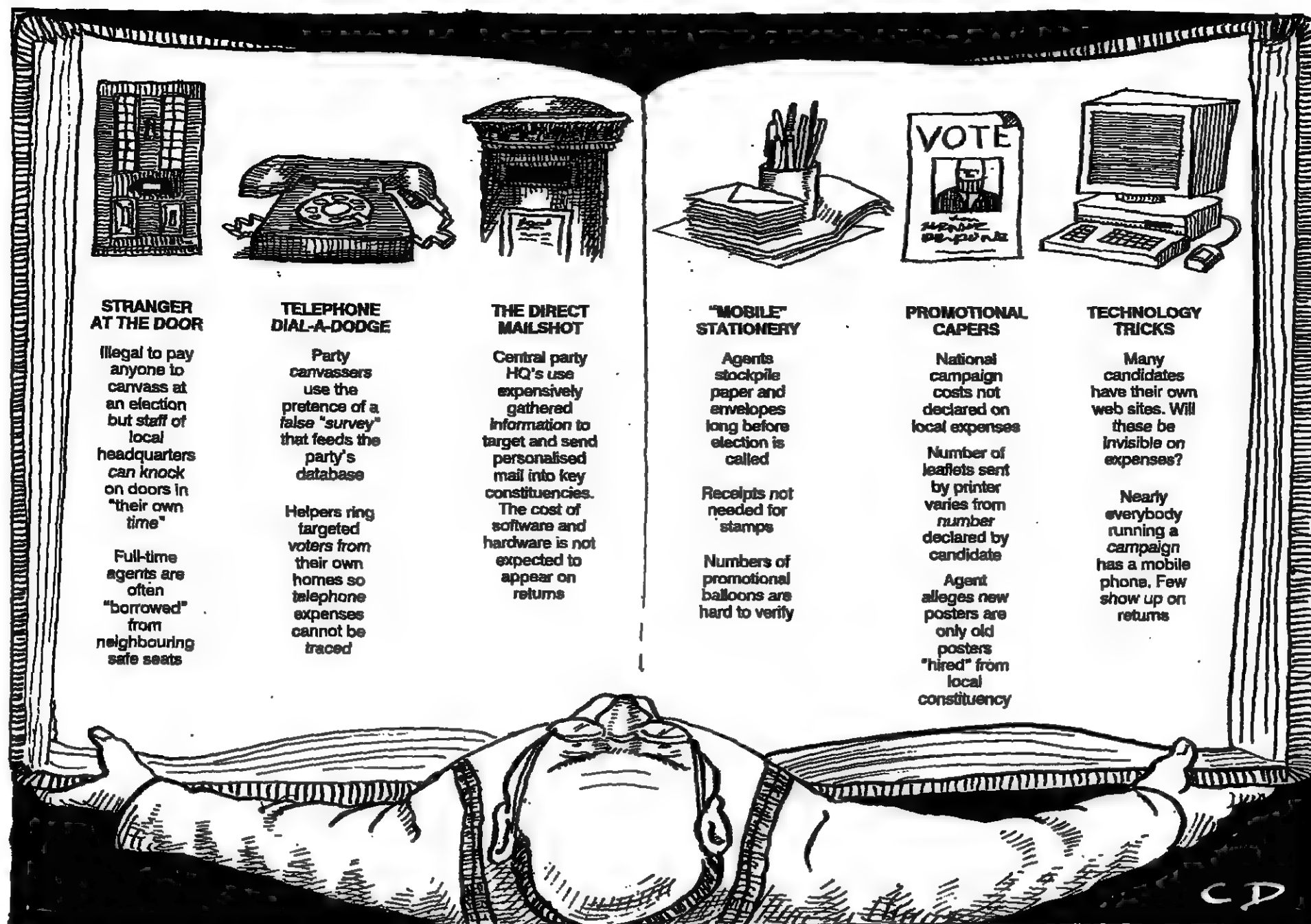
According to a Labour activist, a long-standing gentleman's agreement has been operating between his party and the Conservatives to stop them reporting each other. A Tory campaign veteran said: "You don't often get complaints because all the parties are indulging." Only twice in the past five years have people been prosecuted on charges of breaking the rules, and both were acquitted at Crown Court.

Here is *The Times's* guide to election agents' creative accounting.

□ **The stranger at the door.** The meter for each contender's election campaign starts ticking when he or she becomes the official candidate. From that moment, everything spent should be included on expenses. How do challengers make themselves known to the public before the campaign begins? A wily Tory in a no-hope seat says: "There's nothing to stop me from turning up, introducing myself to constituents and saying that I am the local party convenor, or researcher."

□ **The telephone survey.** A stranger calls. "They do not let on that they are ringing on behalf of a party," says Professor Ron Johnson, of Bristol University. "The implication is that this is just another poll." The information is sent to the party's computer database, matched with the electoral roll and stored for future use. When it comes to getting voters out on polling day, the Conservatives have recruited elderly women after learning that older voters were annoyed by being told what to do by the young. The Liberal Democrats and Tories have both given supporters the numbers of voters in key constituencies to ring from their own homes. The calls cannot be traced, so why include them in expenses?

□ **The mailshot.** The Conservatives have been assembling a secretive scheme called Programme for Identifying and



STRANGER AT THE DOOR

Illegal to pay anyone to canvass at an election but staff of local headquarters can knock on doors in "their own time". Full-time agents are often "borrowed" from neighbouring safe seats.

TELEPHONE DIAL-A-DODGE

Party canvassers use the pretence of a false "survey" that feeds the party's database. Helpers ring targeted voters from their own homes so telephone expenses cannot be traced.

THE DIRECT MAILSHOT

Central party HQ's use expensive gathered information to target and send personalised mail into key constituencies. The cost of software and hardware is not expected to appear on returns.

"MOBILE" STATIONERY

Agents stockpile paper and envelopes long before election is called. Receipts not needed for stamps. Numbers of promotional balloons are hard to verify.

PROMOTIONAL CAPERS

National campaign costs not declared on local expenses. Number of leaflets sent by printer varies from number declared by candidate. Agent alleges new posters are only old posters "hired" from local constituency.

TECHNOLOGY TRICKS

Many candidates have their own web sites. Will these be invisible on expenses? Nearly everybody running a campaign has a mobile phone. Few show up on returns.

Influencing Key Electors, developed by Keith Britto, former deputy director of special services at Central Office. This computer programme uses information such as whether people are shareholders, own cars or have bought their council houses, and it forecasts their likelihood of being Tories on a scale of one to ten. "It is remarkably accurate," says John Stanger, ex-Conservative vice-treasurer in Hazel Grove, where it was used as an experiment in 1992 and helped to secure victory for Sir Tom Arnold by 900 votes. Labour's database is so advanced that, if education becomes an issue, it can send personalised letters to parents of school-age children in key marginals within 24 hours. Only the parties know how many targeted letters have been sent from head office.

The cost of software and hardware is not expected to appear on returns. □ **Flying agents.** Why waste a full-time agent on a safe seat when there is a key marginal next door which needs some extra help? Why tell the returning officer that the agent is being paid £30,000 a year? □ **Stamps.** These are the one cost which can be mentioned on expenses without producing a receipt. One Conservative agent spent £7,000 on postage in his constituency at the last election; it was never declared. □ **The Internet.** Dozens of candidates now have their own Web sites. Will these appear on expenses? □ **Posters.** The agent buys a new set of posters for every election, costing about £2,500. He puts only about £400 on expenses, saying that the posters have been "hired" from the local constituency association and are the same ones which were used last time.

□ **The party leader's visit.** Entertaining the leader, or a celebrity, probably costs £80 a day in travel and feeding expenses, but only £20 will be declared. □ **Empty houses full of supporters.** In the tightest of contests, estate agents have been paid £50 to stick posters in homes which are vacant. This is illegal. □ **Billboards.** A national advertising campaign such as "demon eyes" will not usually be declared on local expenses. If large clusters of billboards appear in the most marginal seats, so be it. □ **A bulging stationery cupboard.** Agents stockpile paper and envelopes long before an election is called. If they

bought it during the campaign, the receipts would have to be submitted. □ **Fuel.** Some agents succumb to temptation in rural seats where fuel is a big expense and fail to account for all the petrol used in ferrying candidates to villages and voters to polling stations. □ **Battle buses.** The hire of a bus and driver for weeks would cripple most campaigns. Trade unions have been known to "lend" a bus to a Labour candidate.

□ **Balloons.** Buy 2,000, declare 1,000. (Try counting balloons.) □ **The generous printer.** Supporting an agent ordered 5,000 leaflets and the printer sent 20,000 back. It is hardly the agent's fault, is it? □ **Videos.** Campaign videos cost about £2 each. Sending one to every home in a constituency would breach expenses many times over. □ **Mobile phones.** Nearly everybody involved in running a campaign will be carrying a

mobile phone. Few returns mention them. □ **Photocopying.** Out of leaflets? Helpful business supporters can take one to their offices and photocopy a few hundred each. No charge. □ **The blind eye.** An agent is legally responsible for all expenditure. In the last days of campaigning, many party workers will appear in a close-fought constituency. "You are not God," said a seasoned campaigner. "You cannot see everything."

Labour last to submit receipts

By Russell Jenkins and Carol Midgley

THE Labour Party kept officials waiting until the eleventh hour last night to submit expense receipts for the Wirral South by-election.

Won by Ben Chapman for Labour, it was widely regarded as the most costly by-election political campaign in recent history and led to allegations that both major parties had exceeded the legal spending limit of £31,113.15 each. On the day of the poll on February 27, the UK Independence Party lodged a formal complaint with police over the amount allegedly spent by Labour and the Tories.

The deadline to hand in expense declarations expired at the end of the working day yesterday, 35 days after polling day. David Leonard, senior electoral registration officer, had been telephoned twice by a representative of the Labour Party to ask what time he left to go home.

At 4.15pm — 45 minutes before the deadline — a Labour Party worker walked into Wallasey Town Hall to hand over the expenses report in a brown envelope. It stated that Labour had spent £29,299.96 on its campaign.

The Conservative Party, which submitted its details on Thursday, also declared itself well within the limit at £27,822.59. Anthony Samuelson, of the Stop Conservatives Posing on Tobacco Companies party, who polled 124 votes, had spent £18,319.77, mostly on legal costs. Flo Lucas, for the Liberal Democrats, declared expenses of £13,790.42.

Yesterday David Lott, national organiser for the UKIP, said he would continue the complaint with police. Merseyside Police said the returning officer had to determine whether a police investigation was necessary.

Big spenders may be holding back for a final flourish

AMID the psychological warfare between the party headquarters, secrecy and misinformation about their election budgets is rife. Talk of the imminent bankruptcy of Conservative Central Office alternates with reports of a general election kitty of no less than £40 million.

Although academic researchers should not expect accurate information until the campaign is over, one can reach reasonably reliable conclusions while it is in progress by examining the amount of advertising commissioned. In recent elections, national publicity has accounted for up to two-thirds of central Tory expenditure and up to half of Labour's campaign costs.

A survey by advertising industry sources shows that, in the 14 month run-up to the

Labour has matched Conservative spending on pre-election advertising, but there is plenty of time left for extravagance, Michael Pinto-Duschinsky writes

election (January 1, 1996, to February 28, 1997), the Referendum Party was the only really big spender. Its 128 pages of national press advertisements and its posters cost more than £5.5 million in rental charges alone. The Conservatives spent just under £3.4 million and Labour about £2.4 million. The Liberal Democrats' operations were too insignificant to appear on the advertising industry's radar. These sums exclude the Referendum Party's distributions of video

tapes, as well as direct mailshots by the main parties. As demonstrated in 1987, when the Tories lavished £3 million on a four-day burst of advertising in the week before polling, opportunities for extravagance remain. Yet, so far, the contest between the Conservatives and Labour turns out to have been considerably less costly than expected.

In the past, when a Prime Minister has left calling the general election to the last moment, campaigns have been exceptionally expensive. That might account for the caution of the Conservatives, whose deficit in the opinion polls provides ample incentive for publicity. Maurice Saatchi has clearly imitated Beau Geste, of the French Foreign Legion, who concealed his limited firepower from the enemy.

The "Yes it Hurt. Yes it Worked" and "New Labour. New Danger" campaigns were financially modest efforts to raise controversy and, with it, free news coverage. Despite announcements by Brian Mawhinney of the improvements in Central Office finances, there was virtu-

ally no Tory poster advertising and only £700,000 of press advertisements in the first ten months of 1996.

While Central Office narrowly outspent Millbank in pre-election advertising, the cost of Opposition propaganda balances that of the Tories when account is taken of the "non-party" campaigns such as that run by the TUC.

The narrow spending gap between the two main parties contrasts with past elections. In 1987, Tory spending on its national poster and press publicity came to £6.4 million, nearly three times Labour's £2.2 million. In 1992, the Tories outspent Labour by £5.8 million to £3.3 million.

When inflation is taken into account, today a Tory campaign on the scale of 1987 would cost £10 million. Last month, for which detailed statistics are not yet available, saw a blitz of posters but almost no advertising in the national press. Talk of a £40 million campaign is way off the mark.

As to whether advertisements are effective in winning votes, there is no clear evidence. The most crucial factors appear to be coverage on television and in the news columns of the tabloids, and party election broadcasts. It is here that the Liberal Democrats have their chance.

□ **Michael Pinto-Duschinsky** is a senior research fellow at Brunel University.

ELECTION SPENDING

Central Party spending on national press and poster advertising at referendum, 1.1.1996 — 28.2.1997

	National press ads.	Cost	Posters	Cost	TOTAL
Referendum Party	182	£4,199,000	£1,371,000	£5,570,000	
Conservative Party	29	£945,000	£2,412,000	£3,357,000	
Labour Party	22	£540,000	£1,885,000	£2,425,000	

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FEATURE

The father, the son. Valerie Grove interviews novelist Martin Amis.

Bonn and Paris break EU ranks on China rebuke

FROM PETER CAPELLA IN GENEVA

WESTERN policy on Beijing is in disarray as a result of Germany joining France in publicly rejecting action for the first time against China by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The issue has divided the European Union and is expected to dominate a meeting of foreign ministers beginning in The Netherlands tomorrow. The meeting has been called to discuss the future of a common foreign policy.

The annual session of the 53-nation UN rights body ends in Geneva on April 18. Although an EU resolution criticising abuses in China has failed for the past eight years at the final hurdle of a vote, rights groups view the gesture as the last chance to demonstrate international concern before Hong Kong reverts to China.

While there may be a last-minute effort by a few individual European countries and the United States to salvage a resolution, the West's spineless deference to China out of concern for commercial contracts has all but killed the resolution before it is tabled, said Lottie Leicht, a director of Human Rights Watch.

Britain will support a resolution that is likely to be introduced next week by Denmark or The Netherlands. In the wake of Chinese threats of retaliation, Britain has adopted a low profile in Geneva and is anxious not to anger Beijing

by taking a lead. Diplomats hope to extract further guarantees on Hong Kong's future before the handover on July 1.

In a letter last Monday, Hans van Mierlo, the Dutch Foreign Minister, told the other 14 members that the credibility of a common foreign policy was being undermined. He added that The Netherlands, the current EU

Beijing has repeated promises of progress for eight years without result

president, would no longer propose any joint initiatives on human rights. The letter also hinted at "a double standard" on the issue.

This has angered France. Then, on Thursday, Germany also announced that it rejected action against China. Both Paris and Bonn support critical dialogue and claim that previous confrontations have been unsuccessful. They have been the chief advocates of a common foreign policy and have, however reluctantly, supported criticism of China in previous years. Paradox-

cally, diplomats now accuse them of burying any remnants of European solidarity on foreign affairs.

President Chirac of France is to make a state visit to China next month in response to the visit to Paris by Li Peng, the Chinese Prime Minister, during last year's UN commissioner's meeting. This time, among other trade deals, defence equipment and a \$12 billion Airbus order are high on the agenda.

In spite of strong public statements of concern, Bill Richardson, the American Ambassador to the UN, earlier this week also declined to lead the attempt to censure China. Like Britain, the United States will back a resolution, however, and is lobbying behind the scenes to counter Beijing's charm offensive among smaller nations.

American companies, including Boeing, secured several contracts in China during Vice-President Al Gore's official visit last month. Campaigners fear that the Chinese "carrot and stick" policy has been successful.

In an attempt to placate its critics, Beijing said it was "seriously examining" signing two key international covenants on human rights. But the statement, used by France as evidence of progress in China's attitude, has been repeated every year since the mid-1980s with no result.



The Hale-Bopp comet photographed over the 12,389ft Fuji, Japan's highest mountain, with an 85mm lens at f2.8 for 30 seconds on 1,600 ISO film

Beat poet Ginsberg has cancer

New York: Doctors have given Allen Ginsberg, the American writer and beatnik, four to 12 months to live after discovering that he has inoperable liver cancer (Quentin Letts writes).

Ginsberg, 70, washed around in his youth with Jack Kerouac and is one of the last survivors of Kerouac's slithery On the Road gang of idle Fifties pioneers of permissiveness. He is "taking the news like a good Buddhist", say friends.

The unconventional and prolific poet, who has championed most things from homosexuality to hallucinogens, was in bed at home in Manhattan yesterday. Although "weepy at times", he was talking about impending death and meditating about the ultimate experience.

The best known of Ginsberg's writings is probably Howl, a 1956 poem which mourned the scrambling of a generation's minds by drugs. He was sometimes called "the most dangerous man in America".

Russians vote to keep loot

FROM ROBIN LODGE IN MOSCOW

IN A rare show of defiance, Russia's lower house of parliament yesterday overturned a presidential veto on a Bill declaring all works of art seized by the Soviet Army from Nazi Germany to be Russian property.

The Bill, which had been passed by a strong majority in the Communist-dominated Duma and by the upper house, the Federation Council, was vetoed last month by President Yeltsin, who said it violated international law. It contradicts an existing agreement between Russia and Germany, calling for a negotiated settlement of the art problem.

At stake are some 200,000 works of art, including paintings by Goya, Delacroix, Van Gogh and Renoir, seized from museums and private collections in Germany by the victorious Soviet forces.

Among the most priceless artefacts are the golden treasures excavated by Heinrich Schliemann at Troy in the 19th century. Estimates vary about the overall worth of the collection, but it is generally be-

lieved to run to billions of pounds.

To overturn the presidential veto, the 450-member Duma needed a two-thirds majority vote. In the event, 308 deputies backed the motion with only 15 voting against. It will now be up to the Federation Council to confirm the decision, for which it too will require a two-thirds majority. While the

Communists hold less sway in the upper house, the growing strength of nationalists suggests that the motion will pass, unless government lobbyists succeed in convincing members of the damage such a move would cause to Russia's now excellent relations with Germany.

If both houses overturn the veto, Mr Yeltsin's only recourse is the Constitutional Court, where he can appeal within seven days. If the court rejects an appeal, he will have to sign the bill into law.

Aleksandr Kotenkov, Mr Yeltsin's personal representative to the Duma, said he was concerned that the law could jeopardise talks between Russia, The Netherlands, Poland and Germany on restitution of art works.

Many Russians take the view that they have a right to the art, as reparations for Soviet cultural losses suffered when Hitler's troops rampaged through the country, looting and burning churches and palaces. Tens of thousands of works of art were seized by SS battalions dedi-

cated to taking the treasures back to Germany.

For nearly half a century after the war, the bulk of the art seized during the war remained hidden, its existence a secret. But in the early 1990s, the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg began a series of exhibitions of the booty, including several previously unknown or forgotten works by French Impressionists.

The exhibitions, which were hailed as further evidence of the new Russian authorities' openness and willingness to shed the Cold War attitudes of the past, attracted tens of thousands of visitors from all over the world.

They also reopened the sensitive issue of restitution. A commission was set up to try to resolve the problem under the Soviet-German Friendship Treaty of 1990, which declared the basic principle of mutual restitution. But virtually no headway has been made since then, with no Russian politician willing to take the political consequences of being seen to give way to German demands.



A Trojan gold cup seized in the war

Colony completes guest list

FROM CATHERINE FIELD IN HONG KONG

ARDUOUS efforts to draw up the guest list for the party to end all parties have at last borne fruit: those lucky enough to be invited to Hong Kong's handover ceremonies should be getting their invitations shortly.

Britain and China are close to finishing a 4,000-strong guest list for the event, a British official confirmed last night. The two sides have agreed to send out invitations

to 400 VIPs at foreign minister level, 1,500 invitations each to other guests, and another 600 to the media and others, the official said.

The guest list will cover countries and international organisations with which Hong Kong has close ties. Invitations will be extended to foreign ministers and heads of international organisations, said Jonathan Lange, spokesman for the handover office.

Foreign ministers rather than heads of state will make up the largest group, a sign

that Peking had succeeded in downgrading the ceremony, diplomats said. Britain will be represented by the Prince of Wales, who will deliver a speech on behalf of the Queen. Baroness Thatcher, who negotiated the agreement sealing Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty, will be among the dignitaries.

The Hong Kong Government has earmarked £18.5 million for the ceremony, £1 million of which will go on hotel rooms and transport for heads of foreign delegations.

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CHANGING TIMES

1550 11:55

THE TIMES
Mobutu's slide
Democrats
Cuba conned
over cocaine

South Africa
Orphan
Father
Rehearsal
Insurance
airline

Mobutu's slide from power signals end of the line for Africa's Big Men

FROM SAM KILEY
IN JOHANNESBURG

ENVOYS from President Mobutu of Zaire are due to meet rebel leaders today for ceasefire talks which will signal the end of the 31-year rule of one of the continent's fast Big Men, and deep concern among his contemporary African potentates.

Kenya's President Moi, faced with elections later this year, banditry in the north and a crime wave in the cities, will be among the most nervous over the outcome to today's talks in Pretoria. "Moi

looks set to win the elections. But what is really bugging him is that a rebel movement dedicated to overthrowing a dictatorship has been enthusiastically backed by the outside world. He is worried that his regime could be the next one to topple," a Western ambassador in Nairobi said.

Zairean rebels this week rejected an offer of six Cabinet seats from Etienne Tshisekedi, the newly appointed Prime Minister. Having swept up a third of the country in an almost bloodless campaign, they are poised to march unopposed into the mineral rich prov-

inces of Kasai and Shaba. The rebels are likely to press their demand for Mr Mobutu to step down.

Mr Mobutu, 66, and Mr Moi, 73, are among the last members of a generation who have ruled with the absolute power of tribal chieftains, harnessing the national coffers to fund a system of corruption and patronage to ensure loyalty. When this has failed, they have resorted to violence. Mr Mobutu had hundreds of political opponents killed and tortured in the years after he came to power in 1965.

Mr Moi has been more subtle,

but Robert Ouko, his arch-rival and Foreign Minister, was murdered in mysterious circumstances in 1990. Richard Leakey, the conservationist and secretary-general of the Saffron opposition movement in Kenya, lives with the constant fear of assassination.

Having been seen by Western powers as vital defenders of capitalism during the Cold War, the continent's autocrats are now seen as men whose time is past. In place of them is a new breed, mostly men who took power in civil wars in the 1980s and 1990s, but have been carefully coached and backed by

Washington ever since. At the centre of this new breed is Uganda's President Museveni, who has weathered criticism for his refusal to allow political parties to campaign in Uganda because he has fulfilled the "good governance" requirements of donor nations — commitments to respect human rights, stamp out corruption, and clean up his administration.

So too have Eritrea's President Aferwerki and Ethiopia's President Zenawi. These three, all former guerrillas, are now among the main backers for Laurent Kabila, the Zairean rebel leader. They are

also much hated by President Moi, who has seen his regional influence wane as his friends have been pushed out of power.

Among the first to fall was the Rwandan Hutu regime of Juvenal Habyarimana whose widow now lives in Nairobi.

Mr Moi, deeply unpopular having amassed a fortune to rival the \$9 billion (£5.6 billion) held by his friend Mr Mobutu, is under no threat from armed rebellion. But recent upheavals in Kenya's universities which spread to Nairobi and Mombasa have caused many observers to wonder how tight Mr

Moi's grip still is. "People in this country will take note of what has happened in Zaire and have already started to talk of an 'uprising'," a leading opposition figure said yesterday.

□ **Lubumbashi:** Rebels entered Zaire's diamond mining capital of Mbuji-Mayi yesterday, sources in the region said. The town was "in the process of changing hands", one mining source said. Most Government troops had fled in vehicles stolen from a state-owned mining company after they looted the businesses of diamond dealers. (Reuters)

Democrats hit by Cuba connection over cocaine cash

FROM TOM RHODES IN WASHINGTON

THE Democrats' controversial fundraising antics entered Caribbean waters yesterday with claims that a prominent Miami businessman, hoping to influence US policy towards Cuba, had solicited a \$20,000 (£12,000) party contribution from a drug smuggler while in Havana.

Congressional investigators have discovered that Vivian Mannerud, a prominent Democratic fundraiser, invited Jorge Cabrera, a cocaine trafficker later convicted on narcotics charges, to make the donation in exchange for an invitation to dine with Vice-President Al Gore.

Cabrera and the Miami underworld have already emerged in the fundraising scandal which dogs President Clinton's second term. However, the Cuba connection, in which Ms Mannerud is said to have solicited money at a meeting in Havana's Copacabana Hotel, caused a stir in Washington yesterday.

Republicans firmly opposed to any thaw in relations between America and Fidel Castro's regime have focused on the meeting and the source of the Cabrera donation as part of planned hearings into irregular Democratic fundraising practices. They are most interested in Ms Mannerud's alleged comments to Cabrera that she needed the money to elevate her status among Democrats in the hope of

improving diplomatic links between Cuba and America.

On his return to America days after the two met, Cabrera wrote a cheque for \$20,000 to the Democratic National Committee, which included the proceeds of cocaine trafficked from Colombia to south Florida. Within two weeks he had been invited to dinner with Mr Gore in an exclusive Miami suburb. Ten days later the smuggler attended a Christmas reception at the White House hosted by Hillary Clinton.

Cabrera, currently serving a 19-year sentence, had used his family fishing fleet as a front for drug peddling. Accused of serious drug offences twice in the 1980s, he was arrested three weeks after the White House party, charged with importing 6,000lb of cocaine through the Florida Keys and fined \$1.5 million.

Previously he had been photographed at both Democratic events with Mr Gore and Mrs Clinton, causing acute embarrassment to the White House when the pictures were released in October last year. The party since has swiftly returned his suspect donation. "Once we found out about Mr Cabrera's past, we immediately returned the money," said Amy Weiss Tobe, an official for the committee. "We feel we have put this behind us."

In an interview with The

New York Times, Ms Mannerud said she could not remember soliciting the donation from Cabrera in Cuba and denied any ulterior policy motive. "People said I saw him for about five minutes," she said, "I can't imagine sitting at a table in Havana soliciting money for the Democratic Party. Who has time for that?"

However, Stephen Bronis, Cabrera's lawyer, said she had targeted his client for funds and they had discussed at least one thing in common — both had met Señor Castro. More importantly, the lawyer claimed she had indicated the need to gain credibility in the party as a means of improving stagnant relations between the Communist regime and the Clinton Administration. "She believed it was in the best interests of Cuban-Americans of her generation if the United States normalised relations with Cuba," said Mr Bronis.

America first imposed a trade ban on Cuba in 1963 and the embargo was strengthened five years ago to prohibit subsidiaries of American companies from doing business with the Communist island.

Last year, under the terms of the Helms-Burton Act signed by Mr Clinton, sanctions were tightened further, punishing foreign companies which did business in Cuba and provoking a trade war with the European Union.

Renault workers protest at lost jobs

FROM REUTERS
IN BRUSSELS

BELGIAN riot police clashed yesterday with Renault workers who marched through Brussels in an attempt to save their jobs and force European governments to increase employment protection.

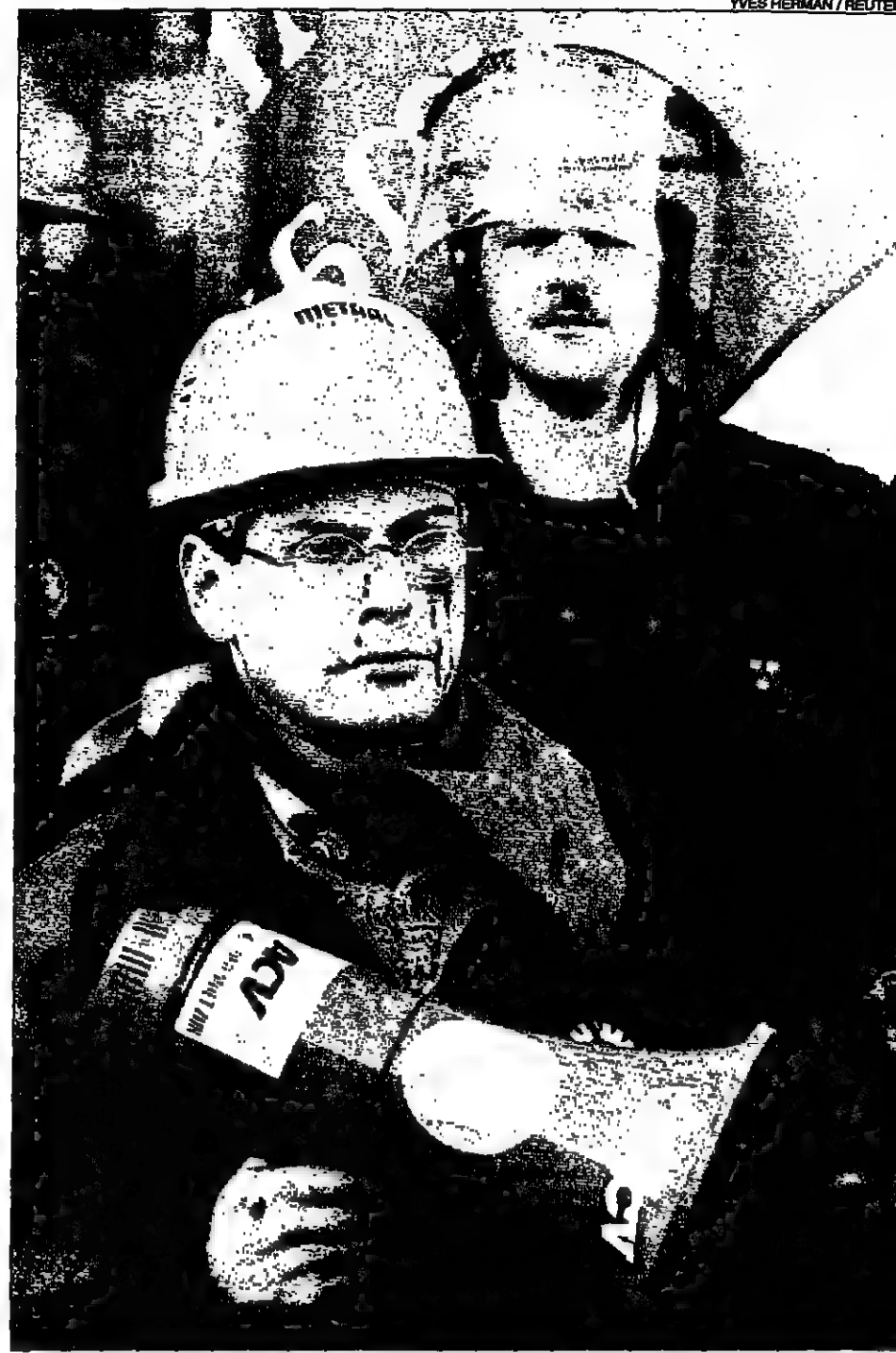
The police turned water cannon on the demonstrators, who hurled stones, eggs and fireworks, brandished wooden and steel staves and tried to tear down barbed wire barricades.

The Renault workers were joined by delegations from France and Spain and the bankrupt Belgian steel firm Forges de Clabeco. Police estimated the numbers at 1,000.

They moved from the Flemish regional government buildings to the Belgian parliament and then on to the headquarters of the European Commission. There were no reports of serious injuries or arrests.

There has been a rash of protests in Belgium and France since the French car-maker announced in February that it would close its profitable plant at Vilvoorde, near Brussels, in July, with the loss of 3,100 jobs.

The workers who have occupied the plant and held cars worth billions of francs for ransom, received a boost on Thursday when a Brussels court ruled that Renault had broken the law by failing to consult its employees. The company says that the closure will go ahead.



An injured demonstrator in front of an egg-spattered Belgian policeman yesterday

Netanyahu weighs up airborne onslaught

FROM CHRISTOPHER WALKER
IN JERUSALEM

THE need for an urgent US initiative to save the Middle East peace process grew yesterday as Israeli-Arab violence erupted for the sixteenth day and Israel said military action was being considered for the first time against Islamic cells in areas of Palestinian control.

The Tel Aviv daily Yediot Aharonot disclosed that undercover Israeli troops had arrested a nine-strong Hamas squad planning attacks.

In the West Bank city of Hebron, Jewish settlers fought back with stones against a crowd of 400 Palestinians who attacked their homes with petrol bombs. Israeli troops used teargas and rubber-coated bullets, leaving 16 Arabs and three Israelis wounded.

Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, is coming under growing pressure from rightwingers to take tougher action. Yesterday it was disclosed that at a private meeting of his Likud party the Prime Minister said he was considering all options, interpreted as a warning that action will be taken if more suicide attacks are launched by Hamas or Islamic Jihad.

Israeli sources said measures under review included helicopter commando raids on suspected militants, killing of Islamic leaders and deportation of suspected bombers.

Mr Netanyahu also threatened military action against the Palestinian Authority unless it implemented a crackdown on Islamic guerrillas.

WORLD IN BRIEF

South Africa 'has 1.3m rapes a year'

Johannesburg: A United Nations report claims as many as one in ten of South Africa's female population — 1.3 million women — are raped each year (Inigo Gilmore writes). The UN human rights report, published this week, claims that this number is 36 times higher than the official figure because victims fail to report the crimes, police believe. The apartheid legacy of mistrust of the police, the report says, is largely to blame. Mark Shaw, of the Institute of Security Studies, while acknowledging that rape is on the rise, sounded a note of caution on the figure. "The point seems to be that rape is an extension of violence in a violent society."

Orphan demands revenge

New York: Lukas Dainys, eight, whose parents were shot dead on Easter Sunday, said he wanted revenge on their killer (Quentin Letts writes). The son of Lithuanian immigrants was orphaned when his parents were shot in the head while relaxing in their home. A colleague of Mrs Dainys has been charged with the shooting. Lukas, who was sleeping when the killings occurred, told the New York Post: "When he gets the electric chair, I want to press the button to kill him." The Dainys arrived in America only eight months ago.

Albanian deployment set

Rome: An Italian-led multinational security force is expected to begin deploying in Albania from April 14, the Foreign Ministry said here after a first meeting in the city of senior diplomats from the eight countries that have either pledged troops to the operation or have said they are considering taking part in some other way. The statement confirmed that General Luciano Forlani of the Italian Army has been appointed to command the force. (Reuters) Letts, page 21

Father yields on \$17m estate

New York: The father of Hollywood child actor Macaulay Culkin yielded control of the 16-year-old's \$17 million (£10 million) estate. Kit Culkin, 51, and Patricia Brentrup, 41, the mother of his five children, managed the acting careers of Macaulay and his siblings before they split. Mr Culkin said he did not wish to contest custody. Miss Brentrup will have control of her children and their money until they are older.

Rehearsal for peace force

Nyanga, Zimbabwe: About 1,500 soldiers from nine southern African armies — some of them longtime foes — began 14 days of joint military manoeuvres in mountainous eastern Zimbabwe that could lead to the formation of a joint peacekeeping force for African trouble spots. Civil war in Zaire is just one example of threats to the region. (AP)



Alan Greenspan with his partner, Andrea Mitchell

Greenspan invests in long-term bond

FROM QUENTIN LETTS IN NEW YORK

WITH the markets safely closed, the chairman of America's Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, will tomorrow marry his long-term investment, Andrea Mitchell.

Mr Greenspan, 71, will wed Miss Mitchell, 50, in a quiet ceremony in Virginia. The groom is expected to allow himself a brief burst of "irrational exuberance" (his recent description of the Dow Jones index) before he returns to his desk on Monday morning.

He and his fiancée, a journalist he has courted for 12 years, are "too busy" to trifle with a honeymoon. She must attend to the demands of a career in television. He has the global economy to run.

Up and down the East Coast of America, the power set are watching Mr Greenspan's merger with something he understands all too well: interest. Henry Kis-

singer, the former Secretary of State, this week threw a party for the couple at Mortimer's, a handsome Manhattan restaurant where the assembled crowd was probably worth more than the combined wealth of several African countries.

For the wedding, about 75 guests will observe the clinching of the most important deal in the life of the veteran banker. They will include Barbara Walters, the perennial media queen and a previous Greenspan step-out who, with everyone else, will be shuttled to the wedding by humble bus (note the curb on spending) from Washington DC's Jockey Club.

The Federal Reserve chairman proposed to Miss Mitchell on Christmas Day — a quiet day on the markets.

Leading article, page 21

Insurers sue ailing Julie Andrews

New York: Julie Andrews, 61, is being taken to court by the insurance companies that issued cover for her current Broadway show. American Insurance Group and associated companies claim the actress was less than honest about her health record when insurance was taken out for the hit musical *Victor/Victoria*, in which she stars.

Taking insurance proved a wise precaution, since Ms Andrews has had a bad

time with her health and voice. She has missed performances, having contracted sore throats, coughs, gall-bladder difficulties (which required surgery), laryngitis and exhaustion. Such is her drawing power that when she is absent from a show Broadway fans demand refunds, presenting the insurers with bills that they are reluctant to pay.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the insurers have faced payments total-

ling £1.6 million (£1 million), with possibly more to come.

Ms Andrews has received high praise for the way she has performed in the musical, but the former young star of *The Sound of Music* and *Mary Poppins* is only human, and her ageing bones have creaked under the weight of her demanding role. She is currently confined to near silence during off-stage daylight hours to rest her voice.

If your bed is ten years old or more, the strain will start to tell.

You can't defy the ageing process... and there is no point taking it out on the ones you love. Why should they put up with you being irritable, restless and snappy when you are literally lying on the problem. A bed that is ten years old or more may not be giving you the comfort and support you need for a good, healthy night's sleep. Lack of quality sleep will blunt your appetite and enthusiasm for everyday living. The answer could be a new bed. As the Sleep Council says: "Sleep good, feel good". So if your bed is feeling the strain as much as you are, get along to your local Sleep Council stockist now. The rest will take care of itself.



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Buy your new bed from an authorized Sleep Council stockist where you see the blue 'SLEEP GOOD - FEEL GOOD' sign.

OPINION

House of disarray: why Covent Garden took so long to sort out its season



THEATRE

Child's play: demands grow for a National Children's Theatre to be established

THE TIMES ARTS



MUSIC

The centenary of Brahms's death is marked, in subdued style, at the Wigmore Hall



ON MONDAY

Reviews of Eternal at Wembley, and a rare show of Turner watercolours

Who said that great fiction was dead? Back on January 31, speaking at the South Bank Show Awards, Tony Blair declared that the arts are "not an add-on, or something we just talk about on page 24 of the manifesto: they are central to our vision of a decent and good society". Gosh, how the assembled juries cheered those heartwarming sentiments! I even jotted them down on a menu, so that I could contemplate them in moments of spiritual crisis.

So has Tony been as good as his word? Well, this week Labour published its manifesto. The good news is, its arts policy is not buried on page 24. The bad news is, it's buried on page 30, just behind details of Labour's "longstanding commitment to angling".

In a 13,000-word manifesto, the arts bit runs to 174 words, and this includes a bizarre sentence about "new quality assurance in hotel accommodation". New Labour, same old philistines? So it seems.

Still, if you list those 20th-century politicians who took a keen interest in culture (Stalin,

Hitler, Ceausescu...) you have to conclude that the traditional approach of the British ruling classes — total artistic apathy — is probably safer.

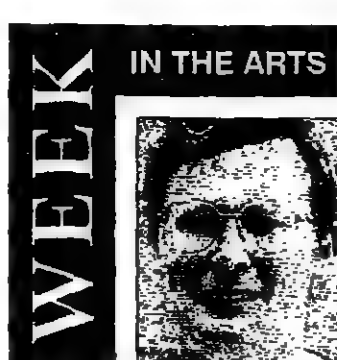
Now, what's going on at the Royal Opera House? The footlights are on, but is anybody home? Has that Titanic among theatres clamped down, Albanian-style, on all contact with the outside world?

You may well ask, Covent Garden closes for its famous redevelopment in three months. For a decade its bosses have been dimly aware (and dim is the word) that the Royal Opera and Ballet would need other venues for two years. They considered Drury Lane, the Lyceum, even a temporary theatre by Tower Bridge. They thought they had a gentleman's agreement with the Albert Hall. But nobody actually did the deals. The years flew by. And the

fury of Covent Garden's patrons grew. After all, if you are regularly spending hundreds of quid on tickets, you expect to be kept informed. Strange quirk of human nature, that. The disarray culminated this week when a press briefing was suddenly postponed.

Well, yesterday Covent Garden confirmed at least some rumours. The Royal Opera will indeed spread its wings to the Barbican, Albert Hall and Shaftesbury Theatre. The Royal Ballet will tread the exotic boards of the Labatt's Apollo. And the melancholy but brilliant Bernard Haitink will stay on as music director until 2002, to general relief.

So why all the delay? First, it seems, the opera house's technicians — never Britain's jolliest workforce — threatened to strike. Their union, Bectu, claimed that performances in Hammersmith constituted a "tour". Tours, as you may have guessed, trigger a whole



RICHARD MORRISON

new astronomy of extra payments. The management's response — that a trip of ten stops down the Piccadilly Line hardly qualifies as one of the world's epic journeys — cut little ice.

Secondly, Covent Garden was still arguing this week with the

other venues about whose box office sells the tickets. The point is less academic than you might think. If other venues sell tickets, they will gain access to Covent Garden's patrons — the country's most affluent theatregoers.

Thirdly, some of Covent Garden's biggest patrons are getting twitchy about whether they will receive the same tender loving care in alternative venues as they do in the Crush Bar. The answer is that they won't. This has caused tears in some quarters. More delay.

And lastly? Well, no Covent Garden saga would be complete without "star turns". Just as Covent Garden thought it could announce Albert Hall performances of Gounod's *Faust* with Roberto Alagna and Angela Gheorghiu, opera's "golden duo" pulled out. "We are well used to Mr Alagna and Miss Gheorghiu changing their minds," an opera house spokesman says wearily.

"We have contingency plans." But more time has been lost.

The trouble is, every hitch generates more contempt for Covent Garden, particularly overseas. It's good that the opera house has finally gone public on at least some plans. Nevertheless, the whole closure business has been grotesquely bungled. Let's hope that the redevelopment itself is better managed. With £78 million of lottery money invested, the public expects competence.

Finally, do you know what time it is? It's exactly 1,000 days before the millennium, that's what it is — and in Greenwich last night they unveiled a giant clock to tick off every blinking milli-second to Mill-Day. And if you think that's a pathetic waste of money, then I don't think you have quite grasped the patrician aspects of the exercise. The fact is, the Greenwich

authorities are paranoid about being left behind on December 31, 1999. How else can you explain the desperate historical note they have issued? "According to the Resolution of the 1884 International Meridian Conference, Washington DC," it drones, "it was agreed that the universal day would begin at midnight on the Greenwich Meridian. Therefore, by international decree, the Prime Meridian at Greenwich is the point from which the millennium will begin." Nice try, chaps, but hopeless. What are they going to say in Australia on December 31, 1999? "Hey, put the bubbly on hold! It may be midnight here, but according to the 1884 Meridian Conference we cannot celebrate for another ten hours." I think not.

What's more, Paris also switches on its Countdown Clock this weekend. And since Paris keeps European time, it will presumably reach the millennium precisely one hour ahead of Greenwich. Will our Gallic friends wait courteously before starting the party? Well, what do you think? Not in a thousand years.

Bottom place in the Tony awards



In the dark: a schoolboy takes part in an English Shakespeare Company workshop

Play time for children

THEATRE: Plans are afoot to lure children out of the house and into the theatre. Simon Tait reports

They are the forgotten audience — the ten million or so school-children between eight and 15 who, directors and playwrights believe, have been disenfranchised as theatregoers.

For them, theatre is either pantomime, dramatised national curriculum texts, or what both funding authorities and venues dismiss as "youth theatre", an unpredictable box-office test even when professionally performed, but which is more often than not done by amateurs.

But now the call is out to address what Michael Bogdanov calls "this national scandal" with a full-blooded National Children's Theatre, a permanent centre for not only the receiving of tour groups but also the nurturing of writers and designers, and the training of directors of children's plays.

Nicolas Kent, artistic director of the Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn which has just got £2 million from the lottery to develop itself for new audiences, says the Tricycle has always had children's theatre as one of its mainstays, and audience enthusiasm has gradually built over the past four years.

"We're doing workshops for children as young as 18 months, which is pretty rare here, but in Europe — Italy, Germany, Scandinavia particularly — the provision of theatre for children, rather than theatre that adults feel they should have, is a national duty."

Jude Kelly of the West Yorkshire Playhouse has long been an advocate of children's and young people's professional theatre, but has never had the funding to pursue it.

"Adults must be educated to the fact that almost any good theatre is enjoyed by children from the age of nine," she says. "Young people are very dis-

cerning with their own tastes in music, TV, fashion — and theatre, if they get the chance." In June there is to be a come-all-ye forum to thrash out the whole question, out of which is likely to come a National Lottery proposal.

Among the most vociferous at the get-together will be Bogdanov, who has resurrected the English Shakespeare Company for the current tour of his children's production of *Beowulf*, in tandem with a darkly fascinating new *Midsummer Night's Dream*, now halfway through its nationwide itinerary.

"Children have consistently been unrepresented in touring," he says. "They are not part of theatre priorities, and they have not been treated as part of the community or of

society. I think it's appalling that they're still being offered *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Snow Queen*, *Sleeping Beauty* and so on, because that's what theatres can get funding for." There are, of course, theatres specialising in children's work, such as the Unicorn and the Polka, but their productions rarely tour and their shows tend to be aimed at the more captive under-eights.

The problem with older children, Kent says, is prising them away from computer games and Saturday morning television, a difficulty shared by the ESC: while box offices have been satisfactorily high for weekday performances during the tour, there has been a palpable drop on Saturdays. Tony Fagan of the London International Festival of The-

atre (Lift) says it is a matter of perception. Last year Lift staged a highly successful education festival and found a sophisticated audience not only ready to see theatre aimed at them, but to participate. "A permanent centre properly resourced and with a high profile could make the most fundamental difference," he says.

The Royal National Theatre has gone some way towards taking the lead. This summer sees the second BT National Connections festival of new plays for young people which will feature work by the likes of Wole Soyinka, Bryony Lavery, Naomi Wallace, Simon Bent and Liz Lochhead. But these are one-acters specifically for young amateurs to produce and perform and, at

an hour's length, will almost certainly never see professional treatment. "I would love to have a parallel festival of professional theatre for young people, but the financial implications are impossible to take on with existing funding," says Susie Graham-Adriani, head of the NT's education department.

There is undoubtedly an audience, she says, and the professional expertise to satisfy it, but the writers, directors and actors have never had the resources to create the work. "There has been a phenomenal output of children's literature in the past ten years which shows a degree of sophistication in the market, but somehow this has not happened for plays," Jude Kelly says. "Children are now part of the leisure scene — even pubs have to cater for them now — and it's high time this was stretched to theatre. It doesn't have to be stretched far."

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The Times MeesPierson Corporate Golf Challenge is open to any company, organisation, partnership, association or body (not golf society) based in the British Isles, which holds a business or company golf day in which 12 or more amateur players take part.

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In tune with the old curmudgeon

CONCERT

Brahms Centenary
Wigmore Hall

von Herzogenberg and Clara Schumann, whose criticism, approval and love were so vital to his writing.

The young contralto Ingeborg Danz's *Wie Melodien zieht es mir* and *Meerfahrt* were high points of the evening. So was Johnson's accompanying: aptly barking and techy in *Kein Haus, keine Heimat*, and then thrilling to the fresher air of a *handful of songs he sneaked in* by Schumann and Wolf.

Johnson made a persuasive case for Wolf's little satire on music critics — the *Aschied* ("Farewell") in which the faithful hack is kicked downstairs — being pointed directly at Eduard Hanslick (Wagner's Beckmesser) and, indirectly, through their friendship and through a specific musical reference to a canon in the *First Piano Quartet*, to Brahms himself. Baritone Stephen Varcoe relished the notion in performance.

This compassionate recreation was done in vintage Songmakers style. Soprano Geraldine McGehee and contralto Ingeborg Danz incarnated in song Brahms's relationship with his two "angels of judgment". Elisabeth

HILARY FINCH

The power and the glory of conjunctions

No words are more emotive than 'but' or 'and', says Derwent May

What is the most sentimental word in the English language? The answer is the word "but". I realised that when I started writing the Nature Notes for *The Times* some years ago. If I wrote "Violets are coming out. Few trees are in leaf yet," I was merely giving the reader information. However, if I wrote "Violets are coming out but few trees are in leaf yet," I was charging the whole scene with emotion, manipulating the reader into a melancholy feeling of winter being slow to go.

Furthermore, if I wrote "Few trees are in leaf yet but violets are coming out," I was doing the opposite: cheering the reader with the feeling that spring was already on its way.

As the Nature Notes were meant to be a bulletin rather than a burst of lyricism, I have been sparing of the "buts" ever since, or sometimes, perhaps, have cheated slightly by juxtaposing observations to give a mild "but" effect.

Shakespeare knew the power of "but". Of his 154 sonnets, 18 have a closing couplet that begins with a "But" (as well as quite a number of "Yets").

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.

However, these are far more than sentimental "buts". They set a whole swirl of passionate emotion into movement, reinforced by the rhythmic passage before them and the clinking rhymes that follow. They are among the most glorious "buts" in the language.

Shakespeare also explicitly remarks on the power of "buts" and "yets" in *Antony and Cleopatra*. When the messenger brings Cleopatra the news that Antony has married Octavia, but is too frightened to tell her, and stammers out "But yet, madam —", Cleopatra takes the full measure of those monosyllables.

"I do not like 'but yet', it does ally
The good precedences; he upon
"but yet!"
"But yet" is as a gaoler to bring forth
Some monstrous malefactor.
Priests, friends,
Pour out the pack of matter to my ear."

"And" is a quite different story, and this, too, struck me when I was writing for *The Times* recently — a review of a book by the great champion of the Surrealists, André Breton.

About one of the essays in the book, I first wrote: "This is one of the liveliest accounts of boyish rebellion and nihilism I have ever read." But that, I knew, was weak — and it was the fault of the "and". To link "rebellion" and "nihilism" in that way was slack and inexpressive. I changed it to "... one of the liveliest accounts of rebellious, boyish nihilism I have ever read."

With that, I hoped, I had achieved a quite different effect. Two abstract nouns slopping about in no sort of relation to each other had given way to a tiny, evolving picture.

So "and" is a dangerous word, and can be a killer. Yet it has other powers. Even as a bare, bald linking word it can make an effect — what the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* calls "connecting occurrences of the same member to express continuous repetition".

The Bible gives the best instances of that. "And Hebron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab, and Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salomon" is pretty boring, it has to be admitted. But imagine it without the "ands". They are what give a great deal of the

King James Old Testament its rolling grandeur.

"And" can be more subtle, though. If used in the right way, it can create anticipation and sweep the end of a sentence up into an awesome climax, as in A. E. Housman's poem in praise of a mercenary army:

Their shoulders held the sky suspended;
They stood, and earth's foundation stay.

Imagine that second line without the "and". That simple little word is what gives their meaning and force to the great words that follow it.

Another example, since we have been talking of early spring, is in Wordsworth's lines on that subject.

The budding vines spread out their fan
To catch the breezy air,
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

Again the "and" in that third line is where the emotion floods in and turns what follows from a statement of belief into an impassioned assertion that nature is sentient.

To shift the focus somewhat, I have been looking at the three main party manifestos in the light of these thoughts. Manifestos do not like the word "but". The words that follow a "but" may make some bold claim about what the party will do, but the emotional charge of "but" works in both directions. So the words that come before the "but" — which are probably an admission of some merit on the part of the other side — get a boost too.

There is an apt German saying here: "Die Sacha hat ein Aber" — "The case has a but in it". One can hear John Major and Tony Blair both saying their manifesto writers: "But me no worry." But me no worry.

In fact, the Conservative manifesto is fairly discreet with them. In Mr Major's foreword there are two sentences beginning with "But". Both follow a statement of good things that the Government has done, such as decreasing the role of the State and increasing the role of the State, and both promise more of such good things: "But now we have the chance..." "But now we must build on..." In both cases the "But" is slightly dangerous because it throws emphasis back on the fact that not enough of these good things have been done.

The Labour manifesto is more risky. There is a dramatic "But" in Mr Blair's first paragraph — "But I believe Britain can and must be better" — which gives a good deal of retrospective emphasis to the suggestion that Britain is pretty good already.

Even more dangerously, a whole paragraph soon afterwards begins with "But": "But we have liberated these values from outdated dogma." That "but" certainly reminds the reader both that there are Labour values that are not exclusive to them, and that they have not themselves done too well by those values so far.

There are few "ands" in either of those manifestos. Manifesto writers understand that little word's killer effect. Bold assertions and promises have to stand on their own. They can go weak at the knees when yoked together.

Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrats, as far as I can see, do the best job of keeping both these unreliable little landmines out of their text. At the beginning of their sentences they stick to a dull but steady repetition of "We will..."

In fact, three-letter words work far harder than four-letter words — and sometimes as much by their absence as their presence.

By their "ands" and their "buts" shall ye know them.

Three-letter words work far harder than four-letter words

For many politicians, there is only one race that matters today, says Geoffrey Wheatcroft

Statesmen of our national turf

A hundred years ago, the Grand National was won by a horse with a political ring to its name. Manifesto ran in eight Nationals in all, was third three times and won twice, with a mere 11st 3lb in 1897, and 12st 7lb two years later. And, four days before the last general election, Grand National was won by Party Politics.

Politics and racing have, after all, been connected on and off almost since Charles II. The two share a nervous atmosphere. Each is a contest in which the hot favourite sometimes wins — but sometimes falls at the last fence — and both are tinged with skulduggery. Part of the very vocabulary of politics is sporting. Steeplechasing is a direct descendant of fox-hunting, whose whippers-in give their name to government or opposition whips, however much that thought might distress "antis" in the Labour Whips' Office.

The *Times* has just reported that a Blair government may not after all make parliamentary time for a Bill to ban hunting. No doubt unconnected with that — although the phrase was unconsciously fascinating — Tony Blair said yesterday that "we have shot the Tories" for over devolution. I doubt whether he has ever shot or hunted a fox.

The House of Commons is a less

sporting place and duller than in the days when the Grand National was as keenly awaited at Westminster as the Budget. In a happier age, Parliament adjourned on Derby Day (when, according to that cynical Liberal, Sir William Harcourt, an Irish MP's vote cost "a fiver, and £10 in Derby week").

No prime minister has ever owned a winner of the Grand National. But, just over a century ago, Lord Rosebery achieved a feat unique in several respects. He won the Derby not once but twice, in successive years, with Ladas in 1894 and Sir Visto in 1895. The odds against any man owning back-to-back Derby winners are long enough to win the race twice within a year was no more than 15 months' premiership was fantastically improbable. To many Liberal Nonconformists, a leader who owned racehorses was little better

than a voluptuary. Lord Rosebery could have made matters better or worse with the horse of that name: if he never owned a Grand National winner, it was bad judgment rather than luck. He owned the well-bred colt, Voluptuary, who won several good races on the Flat as a three-year-old. Carelessly sold by Lord Rosebery, Voluptuary was trained as a steeplechaser, and won the 1894 Grand National as a six-year-old before going quietly on to another career: the stage. The actor Leonard Boyle bought him and rode him night after night in the Grand National scene of *Prodigal Daughter* at Drury Lane.

No British prime minister since has approached Lord Rosebery's eminence on the turf, though the former Irish Taoiseach Charles Haughey has owned some good chasers. Few have even shared his

passion for racing. The nearest was Sir Winston Churchill, for whom it was a consolation of old age.

His father Lord Randolph had won the Oaks with L'Abbesse de Jouarre in 1889, when Winston was a schoolboy. That schoolboy didn't register his colours until he was in his seventies. But he then proved a lucky owner, notably with Colonel II, who won 13 races, and bred the splendid Vienna, who was third in the St Leger and, more importantly, sired Vaguely Noble, one of the great horses of his time.

Although the Tories were once the party of the "Gentlemen of England" and Labour inherited something of the Liberals' chapel-going distaste for racing and betting, there have been exceptions on both sides. Harold Macmillan married into the racing-mad Cavendish family, but never acquired their addiction. Sir Alec Douglas-

Home's sport was cricket (as is John Major's) and Sir Edward Heath's was sailing.

On the other side, the Labour MP Reginald Paget was a keen hunting man. And that shadowy personage, Colonel George Wigg, was shifted by Harold Wilson from Paymaster General to chairman of the Horserace Betting Levy Board, where he made a different kind of nuisance of himself, as well as doing considerable good for racing, his great passion.

More recently, Lord Wyatt of Weeford, the former left-wing Labour MP — hard as that must sometimes be for him as well as others to believe — has been chairman of the Tote. And that ardent racing man Robin Cook, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, will doubtless be taking time off today from the election.

And this year's Party Politics for party politicians? Mr Cook says he is backing Avro Anson, who may start favourite. Straight Talk sounds like Paddy Ashdown's horse, while Mr Blair might like to back Smith's Band, in honour of his admirable predecessor. For the Prime Minister, I suggest Turning Trick. That is what he has to do in the next three weeks to survive at No 10. If that horse wins this afternoon, it could be a portent.

Do they think we are stupid?

The 'dumbing down' of the election is an insult to us, the voters

Vote, vote, vote for Tony Blair
Chut, chut, chut, the door —
If it wasn't for the law,
I would punch him on the jaw,
And we don't want Major any more.

Elections are dangerous moments for a politician. They turn the gold of high office into the base metal of the hustings. They are the extension of civil war by other means, yet they retain the character of a civil war. The public expects a fight, even if nothing is at stake.

The general view of the present election is that nothing is at stake beyond the tenancy of Downing Street. The Thatcherite revolution has triumphed. It conquered the Tory party and has now conquered Labour. As Chesterton said on being shown the Café Royal menu, there is little in the Labour manifesto to which Lady Thatcher could take strong exception. John Major was her heir but Mr Blair has become her clone. The two men must fight over a straw.

Yet must the election be so dumb? I returned from holiday this week, picked up the two party manifestos and groaned. Labour features a ridiculous Mr Blair looking hostile, unsmiling and exhausted, as if fleeing a Benetton commercial for a role in *Trainspotting*. What mighty conclave of spin gurus agreed this image? The Tory manifesto, so free in attacking British education, braves a schoolboy howler in its title, misplacing the "only" in "You can only be sure with the Conservatives". It reads like a condom advertisement. I prefer to be sure "only with the Conservatives".

When I mentioned this to a party worker, she said: "Oh come on, the manifesto is not meant for you." In other words, who cares about grammar? Manifestos are for plebs, for the Great Unlearned. And they will not read them. They are show, marketing, mood music, political wallpaper. Elections are a passing masquerade, while Ye Old England quietly shuffles the Westminster pack. They are a necessary ritual of power.

I can see her point. Reading this week's manifestos was like watching saliva dribble. Boast follows whinge follows boast follows whinge. They are written to be identical, as Tony Benn once protested, "by Dr Mori and Dr Gallup." We will switch spending from economic failure to invest-

ment," says one. "We favour new combinations of available benefits to suit individual circumstances." "A good education is the birthright of every child." "We have zero tolerance of underperformance." A plodding political platitudes can be propped up by inspired oratory. Churchill knew the trick. On paper, it merely plunks.

Most of this week's phraseology dies on the brain. "Conservatives embrace evolutionary change." (I should hope so.) "We have turned around our economic fortunes." British English teaching may be bad, but not this bad. This is simple waffle. Labour has not stolen the Tories' clothes. Both parties have stolen Paddy Ashdown's, through whose gossamer garments every political breeze passes unnoticed.

Manifestos are games with mirrors, played contemptuously of voters. Their writers and readers — mostly politicians and journalists — claim that they are not for them. Manifestos are to reach out to simpletons in the sticks — people who cannot do joined-up writing, yet supposedly thirst for statistics on comparative GDPs. Elections have joined books, newspapers and broadcasters in the great drift downmarket, in the "dumbing down" of Britain. This week's manifestos are on a par with sleaze stories and headless chickens. They are to furnish a day's media distraction — until the awful business is over on May 1.

I go so far with the Central Office cynic, but no further. First, there must be protein even in the most vegetarian manifesto. Heaven knows, enough blood is spilt in the writing. These gripped by the hand of power find it hard to compose 20,000 words and say nothing. Adverbs and adjectives may be subservient but, as Humpty Dumpty said, verbs and nouns have a way of their own. The Tory plans for privatised pensions, tax relief for spouses and the sale of London Underground are innovations forged in the heat of manifesto compromise. They are real changes.

By comparison, there is little in Labour's manifesto but raw ambition. Yet even its emptiness was the outcome of a bitter struggle within the Shadow Cabinet. The fight was to protect an incoming Blair administration from the spendthrift promises which devastated Mrs Thatcher's first year. Puncture the



Blair helium balloon and it may collapse in a puddle of rubber (amid which glow one gem, an elected mayor for London). But the manifesto is eloquent even in what it does not say. Labour's silence proclaims that 1990s Toryism is safe with Mr Blair and his friends.

That said, I yearn for a thinking person's manifesto, a manifesto for grown-ups, one that debates topics that neither Labour nor the Tories consider suitable for children's viewing. This might include some guide to how each party will balance tax rises against spending cuts to reduce public borrowing; how local and central discretion will be balanced in running schools; what is the "bottom line"

negotiating position at this summer's European summit; where lies the future of farm subsidies and the countryside; what of restricting car use; how should we reform Britain's illiberal, dangerous and unsustainable drugs laws; what future for devolution in Northern Ireland. This is all controversial, and therefore suppressed. Politicians wish to keep such controversy from public view, keep it within the club, even if the club is to change its committee — perhaps especially so.

On television on Wednesday night, the BBC daringly permitted four "ordinary people" a brief moment on stage. The four were women from Worcester, invited to discuss tax allowances for mothers

at home. They did so with a clarity and a scepticism that belied the normal casting of electors as credulous. They were soon cut off. The smile of reason makes bad television. We returned to the studio, to Mr Paxman and Mr Portillo. Mutt and Jeff, Ya and Boo. Yet before the oze closed back over our heads, we were permitted a sudden sight of blue sky. It was exhilarating.

The media prefers to present lay people as political yobs, like those paraded last week on Channel 4's *Cutting Edge: The Dinner Party*. The subplot of this programme was to show how glibly voters can be with enough drink inside them, and thus how much better it is to leave politics to pundits. I assume the sub-subplot was to show how dangerous elections are, and how sensible Britain is to have fewer than any other country in Europe. Yet I find that when people are invited, and given time, to talk seriously about policy they are more sensible, and certainly more sincere, than the stage-army of the partisan. Anyone who has done jury service will agree that encountering a random selection of fellow citizens can be unnerving. They are almost as intelligent as oneself.

Politics in Britain, as de Tocqueville said, is a club activity. In America it is a civic duty. We read much about British politics becoming more American, but the comparison is usually of leadership campaigns, not of voters. I believe British voters are coming to take elections as seriously as do Americans. This may be one reason why they are more "floating" and more inclined to trouble the pollsters. To treat them as a lumpen proletariat unfit for complex discourse is to patronise and insult them.

The political community may cite Hogarth, Dickens and the Victorian ditty with which I began this piece. But if Gladstone could rouse a half-educated electorate with an erudite two-hour speech, I cannot accept that today's better educated voters must be dismissed with clichés. As politicians go downmarket, they are in danger of passing the electorate on the way up. They may quote Bonar Law's joke: "I am their leader, I must follow them." But the destination need not always be that chosen by the Editors of *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*.

As the band played, Noël Coward gazed into the eyes of Gertrude Lawrence and said how strange it was that "cheap music could be so potent". The assumption of this election campaign is that cheap politics is also potent. I believe this is mistaken. Serve up cheap politics, as the parties did this week, and the electorate will react cheaply. It will impede good government and neuter its practitioners. We can surely afford to be more extravagant with the truth.

Fowl play

ALL those chickens on the general election trail have upset the pious souls of the ITN newsmen. While newspapers and the BBC threw themselves ecstatically into the tale of the Tory clucker sent to follow Tony Blair around the country — and its headless counterpart from *The Mirror* — at ITN they were dismayed. Should they, or should they not, cover the chicken story?

The reporters on *News at Ten* were divided. Too trivial, said half of them, including the political editor Michael Brunson. Too much fun to ignore, argued the other half. Coverage of the various rhinos, bears and foxes piling onto the scene caused yet more angst. This from a news programme that brought us the *And Finally* slot at the end of each broadcast

dealing with cat-up-tree yarns. While Coffeemate curdled in their cups, neither side would budge. "The chicken issue became definitive of the whole way the *News at Ten* would be covering the election," said my man by the water cooler. So to prevent a full-blown row, it became necessary to take a vote. The newsmen gathered and the question was put, to cover the chicken or not. The pro-chicken lot won, just.

By way of compromise, however, only the Tory chicken was shown, not the headless *Mirror* one or the other wildlife. "It was very nasty in there for a while," says my insider. "It is not going to get any nicer over the next few weeks. This was about the whole nature of our reporting."

Easy does it

THERE is a charming lethargy to the election strategy of Peter de Savary, the Referendum candidate for Falmouth and Camborne. While Sebastian Coe, his Tory opponent, limbers up to protect his 3,267 majority, de Savary has decided to take a holiday. A Referendum spokesman believed him to be



"resting" at Skibo, his castle on the northeast coast of Scotland, a long way from Cornwall.

De Savary's daughter Lisa, who represents her father during his absences, explained: "We have decided not to bore the pants off voters with personal image campaigning. My father will embark on that two weeks before the election."

Distinctly ungallant remarks were made by Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers, in front of an embarrassed Gillian Shephard yesterday. "If these manifestos are supposed to represent the passion of Tony Blair and John

Major," he said, "I have to say I cannot help feeling sympathy for both Cherie and Norma."

Water wing

AS though according to a biblical curse, the offices of the hosepipe banners at the Department of the Environment have been flooded. On Wednesday afternoon, staff were ordered home after a burst pipe let gallons of water gush



through the top floor of Eland House, Victoria, where John Gummer, the Environment Secretary, has his offices. Gummer, of course, was the man who during the past couple of years of water shortages hounded water companies to repair their leaking pipes and asked the public to bathe in bowls.

Panic has subsided at the Royal Academy of Arts, in London, where Baroness Thatcher's Spitting Image head mysteriously disappeared from a satirists' exhibition over the Easter weekend. It has just been returned anonymously in a package sent from Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Hosanna

TAFFETA will feature strongly in Cambridge during the election now that Anna Johnstone, an opera singer, has announced she will be standing for the ProLife Alliance Party. Miss Johnstone, 28, a recent convert to Catholicism, made news two months ago at her London debut in St James's, Piccadilly, when she exhorted the audience to pray along to her Baroque warblings. Speaking to the *Catholic Herald*



Anna Johnstone: stump arias

this week, she admits that pounding the streets of Cambridge on her election campaign is at times "harrowing", but for her politics is not everything: "If I did no more than sing the *Ave Maria* in different places all over the world," she says, "I'd be happy." After being a parliamentary candidate, her next role will be in *La traviata* in Siberia.



That chicken: not serious enough for Michael Brunson





LOST IN TRANSLATION

Blair sounded better in the original English

Gaffes are mistakes. Gaffes are unintended. When Tony Blair told the Scots yesterday that ultimate sovereignty would reside with Westminster after devolution and that, if a parish council could raise tax, so should a Scottish parliament, these were no slips of the tongue. They were a calculated attempt to reassure English voters that a Labour government would not create a levathan north of the border.

Scottish politicians and journalists have been offended by this. But everything said in Scotland is not aimed only at Scots. Scottish aspirations demand and deserve respect; but policies planned for Scotland are not matters for that nation alone. Scotland is part of the United Kingdom: the audience for Mr Blair's words extends around the country, and the repercussions of devolution will be felt well south of Hadrian's Wall.

Some Scots are angry that elements of the agreement reached in their "constitutional convention" about the right form of devolution have been watered down by Labour. They see this as a betrayal because the convention's proposals were reached by cross-party consensus. Yet there was hardly any English involvement in those negotiations. Labour has to fight an election across the whole of Britain, and this issue has expanded from a Scottish to a British one. English anxieties too have a right to be heard and to be assuaged.

Mr Blair, as it now is clear, did not provocatively compare a Scottish parliament with a parish council: he asked why, if even a parish council was allowed to raise revenue, it should be shocking that a Scottish parliament could do so too? Such words are hardly hostile in sentiment to devolution. This is only an insult if wilfully interpreted as such.

The real trouble lies not in Scotland as a whole but in the Scottish Labour Party which has for some time been the last

bastion of old Labour. It reluctantly voted to replace Clause Four. Its members suspect, rightly, that Mr Blair does not sign up to their purist ambitions for devolution. Now that supporters of the Labour leader have at last managed to win control of the party executive, the "newing" of Scottish Labour is under way, to the fury of the "old". If the executive can control the selection of candidates for the Scottish parliament, then they too are likely to be Blairites.

The Labour leader said yesterday that, even if Scots vote for their parliament to have tax-raising powers, Labour members will undertake not to use them between now and the next general election. This too is anathema to old Labour Scots. They see it as an emasculation of their ambitions and are already trying to portray it as a Westminster veto on Scottish deliberations.

What they most dread is that the powers of the new parliament are going to be weaker than those agreed at the constitutional convention. Each time that Mr Blair says something designed to reassure English voters, they interpret it as backsliding. They may well be right.

Mr Blair, they scoff, simply wants a parliament north of the border that will not cause trouble for him as Prime Minister. He would be sensible to do so. In the interests of the nation as well as of himself. For while a small amount of tension between Westminster and Edinburgh may be unavoidable, even creative, a large amount could indeed lead to the nightmare of which the Conservatives warn. The Scottish Nationalists could exploit discontent as a wedge to achieve full independence.

Scottish devolutionists are understandably disappointed that they may not achieve all that they want, and that they have long awaited from a Labour government. But whatever devolution they get will be a better outcome for them than the status quo.

THE TALEBAN TACTIC

Dark Ages at home: drug smuggling abroad

Afghanistan is fast disappearing into the primitive obscurity of the 7th century. Each week Radio Shariat, the voice of the bearded Islamic zealots who now rule Kabul, announces arbitrary new decrees. Petty, quixotic and almost comical in their far-fetched interpretation of religious purity, they are, nevertheless, the building blocks of a dictatorship now suffocating the nation.

Photography, television, video players and music are banned because they are contrary to Islam. Kite-flying is a frivolous distraction and prohibited. Football offends religion because it allows men to show their legs. But the most pernicious decrees are those dealing with the status of women.

Thrown out of work, banned from public appearance unless veiled from head to foot, deprived of legal rights, they are obliged to remain secluded at home, the chattels of their menfolk. Kabul's schools have begun a new term without any girls. Women must not wear white socks lest they are attractive to men. House owners must paint over ground-floor windows in case passers-by see a woman inside. Indeed, the Taleban's attitude was summed up by an official in the Attorney General's office: "The face of a woman is a source of corruption for men." Here is a culture suffering not only extreme zealotry but institutionalised misogyny.

Poverty and despair are the breeding grounds of fanaticism. Few countries have suffered more or seen their culture so comprehensively destroyed by alien troops and ideologies than Afghanistan. Its mountains are strewn with millions of mines; its agriculture is ruined; it has been abandoned by the West, forgotten by the strategists and left to its own murderous post-communist civil wars. Ancient tribal and ethnic rivalries

have set clan against clan. For years rockets rained down on the besieged capital as warlords battled for control. The men of the Taleban were successful, not least because they promised peace, stability, unity and an iron discipline.

Like the Khmer Rouge, the Afghan victors are now putting into practice the extremism that fuelled their fighting spirit. This poses a dilemma for the remaining Western agencies. Should the Red Cross and United Nations relief agencies threaten to leave altogether if women's conditions are not improved, or should they remain and attempt to mitigate the new misery?

A less principled dilemma faces policymakers in the West. In the new Great Game, Afghanistan is seen as a way of weakening Iran, whose Shia hierarchy is horrified at being outdone in Islamic zeal by its Sunni neighbours. Western policymakers are quietly backing attempts by Pakistan, long-time backers of the Taleban, to open Afghanistan to trade and transit. Saudi and American interests want to build a gas pipeline from Central Asia. Simply by not condemning their human rights record more forcefully, the United States is giving the new rulers of Kabul free rein.

The calculation is that once law and order are established, the zealots will, under the experience of government, discover pragmatism. There is little to support this hope. More compelling is the evidence that the Taleban are harbouring foreign Islamic revolutionaries and financing their state through a huge new heroin trade. The Taleban tactic is not only to impose an obscurantist regime on its own people: it is also to export even larger quantities of drugs to the world outside.

WASHINGTON WEDDING

Rates and ratings for the power couple from DC

An American who might legitimately be described as the most powerful man in the world will be married tomorrow. This does not mean that bigamy can join the long list of charges hurled at Bill Clinton by his many opponents. The man about to tie the knot is Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board and prime influence upon the level of US interest rates.

The President of the United States certainly looks an impressive figure. He has a big house, a fine plane and a phalanx of secret service agents. Mr Clinton, however, is constrained by Congress, interest groups, public opinion, foreign governments and the Federal Reserve Board. His room for completely independent action is much more modest than it looks. Lyndon Johnson once complained that "the only power I have is nuclear and no one will let me use that".

By contrast, Mr Greenspan has few such limitations. Since his appointment in 1987 he has dominated the world economy. His views determine interest rates, stock market levels, and currency values. Those decisions soon feed through to wallets here in Britain. Every word uttered by Mr Greenspan is analysed thoroughly by the financial community. Normally his vocabulary is deliberately delectable. Many a congressional committee has been completely perplexed by his testimony. When, last December, he described the rise in share values as "irrational exuberance", stock markets around the world briefly crashed.

Now it seems that Mr Greenspan has been experiencing some exuberance of his own. A man of enormous care and caution, he has spent 12 years in the constant company of Andrea Mitchell, one of the best rated television news reporters in the United States. In that time they have established themselves as the premier power couple in Washington. Unexpectedly, he popped the question last Christmas. Even on this occasion his language was so opaque, it is said, that it took three attempts before Ms Mitchell realised he was proposing.

Washington will now have its wedding of the year and is awash with excitement. This is a place of liberal politics and conservative attitudes. While the social scene has coped with its most prominent cohabiting couple, there will be great relief that this 71-year-old man and 50-year-old woman have finally become conventional. Crude New Yorkers will, of course, analyse the ceremony and honeymoon for clues towards interest rate policy. Washingtonians are simply relieved that dinner party etiquette will be more straightforward in future.

Unfortunately, the happy couple are unlikely to be awash with expensive presents. A law passed last year means that a public official may not accept gifts exceeding \$20 in value from anyone with whom he might have professional dealings. In Mr Greenspan's case this means the population of the planet. That sounds like a lot of kettles and toasters.

Italian case for a force in Albania

From the Chairman of the Italian Senate Foreign Affairs Committee and others

Sir, We cannot accept your suggestion in a leading article today that Italians should "rethink" the Albanian expedition currently being prepared in Rome. The consensus in Italy, as confirmed by a vote in Italy's Lower House yesterday, is that our country cannot just stand by and watch Albania self-destruct.

Our motives for supporting and promoting an international force whose task, as sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council, will be to protect and supervise the distribution of humanitarian aid in Albania, are not, as you say, mere national self-interest — for all that such a motive is in itself perfectly legitimate — but rather the conviction that in the current era of global security the citizens of Albania have every right to expect the international community, and Europe in particular, to shoulder some responsibility for their security and wellbeing.

The sooner this happens, the better for all, as testified by the pressing requests being made by all sides in Albania, even by community leaders in Valona, the port town currently in the hands of armed rebels, from which the ill-fated victims of last week's collision had sailed (report, March 31). It is not in either Italy's or our European partners' interest to allow Albania to become a festering sore in Europe's southern flank, exporting crime and misery across the continent.

Italy, we believe, deserves gratitude both for having taken in, quite alone, over 13,000 refugees and for volunteering to lead a practically difficult mission. In all international humanitarian or peacekeeping missions carried out so far — by common consent, including Somalia — Italy's armed forces have distinguished themselves for their ability in undertaking international police tasks.

Readers of *The Times* should rest assured that neither Italy's Parliament nor, indeed, our international partners in this mission, will consent to an expedition being dispatched without both a clear mandate and a firm agreement on chain of command and division of duties.

Yours sincerely,
GIAN GIACOMO MIGONE,
Chairman,
Senate Foreign Affairs Committee.
STEFANO BOCCO
(Verdi Clinic).
JAS GAWRONSKI
(Forza Italia).
SAVERIO SALVATORE PORCARI
(Alleanza Nazionale).
SAVERIO VERTONE
(Forza Italia).
TANA DE ZULUETA
(Sinistra Democratica Ulivo).
Palazzo Madama, 00186 Rome.
April 3.

Catholic doctrines

From Mr Richard Beddingfield

Sir, For those of us who sincerely believe in the Catholic faith, it is disturbing to read an article which takes the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church to task as casually as Tom Murphy does ("A Priest accused of heresy", Body and Mind, April 1).

The Sri Lankan priest, Father Tissa Balasuriya, has openly denounced doctrines which are regarded by the Catholic Church as being part of divinely revealed truth, and the Church therefore has a duty to the faithful around the world to establish that these opinions do not represent authentic Catholic teaching.

Undeniably, it is said that Father Balasuriya should endure excommunication at 72, but how much more of a loss would it be if communities in Sri Lanka and elsewhere were misinformed about the truth as a result of the publication of his book. *On Mary and Human Liberation*.

Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, holds a thankless position in the Vatican. I find it reassuring that he has the courage to fulfil his role by condemning error where it appears.

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD BEDDINGFIELD,
Oxburgh Hall, King's Lynn, Norfolk.
April 1.

Cavalry charges

From Major L. E. N. Neville-Jones

Sir, Like Mr Bridgewater and General Friedberger (letters, March 31) I was surprised to read (report, March 26) that the charge at Omdurman in 1898 "is generally considered to be the last (British Army) cavalry charge". A lot of old Yeomen must turn in their graves every time they hear this suggestion.

For instance, the Queen's Own Dorset Yeomanry, on February 28, 1916, in the Western Desert, found themselves alone on the battlefield faced by the rearguard of a force of Senussi who had invaded Egypt and were under Turkish orders.

The regiment, which could only muster 196 men including the cooks and the farriers respectively with their cleavers and branding irons, charged over three quarters of a mile of firm sand and completely routed the enemy, who numbered more than 500 men with rifles and three machine guns.

Colonel Souer and Lieutenant Blaksley, both of whose horses had

Upholding standards in public life

From Mr Mohamed Al Fayed

Sir, Sir Edward du Cann (letter, April 3) says John Major "deserves credit" for the Nolan committee reforms and the Downing inquiry. There would never have been a Nolan committee but for the disclosures I made, first to the Prime Minister on September 29, 1994, and to the press on October 20.

I did this in the public interest, notwithstanding the considerable personal and commercial risks involved. Sir Gordon Downey would never have investigated "cash for questions" if I had not forced the issue in front of the Commons Privileges Committee, despite the efforts of some of the members to restrict my testimony when I appeared before it on November 1, 1995.

Sir Edward says I "wasted parliamentary time and taxpayers' money" by making a monstrous allegation against the Home Secretary. Sir Gordon Downey did not see it like that and found no fault with me (report, March 7, later editions). Rather, he said: "I have no reason to think that Mr Al Fayed is not telling the truth as he sees it." He stated: "Mr Al Fayed has discovered fragments of evidence which, when pieced together, seem to support the explanation of a bribe..."

Even though he did not uphold my complaint, Sir Gordon made no criticism which could justify Sir Edward's charge that my complaint was vexatious. His demand that I face "justice"

is rich indeed from a man who, as chairman of Lonrho, led a lengthy parliamentary campaign against me.

Yours faithfully,
M. AL FAYED,
Chairman,
Harrods Ltd, Knightsbridge, SW1.
April 3.

From Mr Stephen Axby

Sir, I resent the Conservatives saying that they wish to move away from sleaze in order to concentrate on the "real" election issues.

In my view sleaze is a real issue. It is the belief that standards in public life aren't very important to ordinary people that has helped lead so many Tories into trouble in the first place.

Yours etc.
STEPHEN AXBY,
40 Heathfield North,
Twickenham, Middlessex.
April 3.

From Mr Peter Roxburgh

Sir, I see in today's edition that the Conservative Party is paying somebody to follow Tony Blair dressed as a chicken. Perhaps Mr Blair should respond in kind and pay someone to follow John Major dressed as a large brown envelope?

Yours faithfully,
P. ROXBURGH,
9 Festing Road, Putney, SW15.
April 3.

Freemasons' role in law and charity

From Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell Syms

Sir, Perhaps the most disquieting element of Masonic influence in the civil courts ("On the square, but are they on the level?", Law, April 1) is that many Masons will deny membership. Without a statutory and supervised register of the interests and membership of the judiciary, the legal professions and court officials, how can listing clerks avoid the risk of perverting the course of justice?

In his letter of March 28 Mr M. B. S. Higham, the Grand Secretary of the United Grand Lodge of England, refers to Freemasons' exemption from the Unlawful Societies Act 1979 (obtained by lobbying the then Prime Minister). In fact, this Act, which was repealed in 1967, imposed restrictions on Masons, including registering all members of each lodge with the clerk of the peace.

Is that so different from the Home Affairs Select Committee's latest recommendations (report, March 26) which now have the Masons all of a tizzy?

Yours faithfully,
E. N. GASKELL SYMS,
86 Victoria Road,
Barnet, Hertfordshire.
April 1.

From Mr J. E. Bloomfield

Sir, As a Mason, a Rotarian and former member of the Round Table (you have to retire at 40), I know that all three of these organisations have common aims of fellowship (or brotherhood), goodwill to all men and charity.

It is obligatory for Round Tablers and Rotarians to wear lapel badges. Such badges are available for Masons but it is not obligatory to wear them.

Masons contribute significantly to local charities, many of them non-Masonic. Virtually every hospice in the land receives annually large measures of Masonic monetary support. Masons go quietly about their support for worthy causes and do not advertise.

There is, locally, a boat which offers free trips for disabled people. Embroidered on it are Rotary, Round Table and Lions logos. It is also supported by a local lodge, but this is only shown in the boat-owner's accounts.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN BLOOMFIELD,
(Past Master, Lodge of Concord, Southampton).
Reynolds Cottage,
Mill Lane, Brockenhurst, Hampshire.
April 2.

Farmers and hunting

From Mr James Crosbie Dawson

Sir, Mr G. W. Baron (letter, March 28) is surely naive to suggest that one of the reasons why farmers plant and preserve hedgerows, copses, etc. is their "natural respect for a varied and attractive countryside". A few may do this. Most do so because of the sporting benefits that such habitats produce.

Speaking personally, I could easily run my farm without any hedges and would probably farm better as a result. The reduction in the herbivore population would undoubtedly benefit the crops.

Anyone who doubts the feasibility of farming without trees should take a trip through the grain-growing areas of northern France, where every square metre is cropped. The crops look magnificent and yield accordingly.

Any attempt to restrict field sports by legislation will undoubtedly have an adverse effect on the countryside as we know it, and in many cases could only ever be partially effective. Hunting, shooting, etc. will always go hand in hand with conservation.

Yours faithfully,
J. CROSBIE DAWSON,
Northampton Farm,
Overton, Hampshire.
April 3.

'Completing' Elgar

From Mr Raymond Monk

Sir, Mr Paul Grafson's letter (March 29), which sought to justify the Elgar family's support for the "completion" by Anthony Payne of Elgar's Third Symphony, was in my view unfair to the memory of the composer's daughter, Carice Elgar Blake. Carice, who was my friend, was not, as Mr Grafson suggests, in any way responsible for the present highly unsatisfactory situation. The agreement she signed in July 1934 with Sir John Reith (acting on behalf of the BBC) was specifically designed to prevent any such "hinkering" with the sketches. The relevant clause being:

"The Corporation for itself its successors and assigns hereby undertakes and agrees that none of the said manuscripts shall ever be published either in whole or in part and that they will not permit any person whatever to have access to the said manuscripts for the purpose of finishing or completing or making any alteration."

Perhaps, therefore, it is the BBC which should be called to account in this matter and not my late friend, who did everything possible to meet her father's dying wish.

Yours faithfully,
RAYMOND MONK (Senior Trustee,
The Elgar Foundation, Leicester).
19 Severn Street, Leicester.
March 31.

How loyal readers earn their prizes

From the Editor of New Innkeeper Magazine

Sir, The topic of reader competitions (Mr J. F. K. Hinde's letter, April 2) causes some hilarity, as well as serious concern, among journalists in the trade press where, if the competition is too simple, reader response can be in inverse proportion to the value of the prize.

A fellow editor confesses having had no entries whatsoever for a competition offering an all-expenses-paid VIP week for two in Chicago. The questions for this competition, like that noted by Mr Hinde, contained all the answers. On another market-leading magazine which I once edited (circulation 36,000), we could receive seven or eight entries for simple competitions with very attractive prizes such as VIP weekends in European capitals. However, at the same time we attracted a truly outstanding 600 responses to a competition for which the top prize was a Guinness T-shirt.

Not surprisingly, our conclusion is that if the competition is simple, make the prize "winable" — i.e. modest. And if the prize is valuable make readers work for it. This magazine has just sent a group of eight readers on an all-paid week in New Orleans as a prize to a competition; but entrants had to submit to a six-months-long postal "Business Game", with the aim of helping publicans develop new business skills. Just under 1,000 people joined in (6 per cent of circulation).

The moral is: enter newspaper competitions — the odds are better than the lottery.

Yours faithfully,
ANDREW PALMER, Editor,
New Innkeeper Magazine,
The British Institute of Innkeeping,
Wessex House,
80 Park Street, Camberley, Surrey.
April 3.

Seek and fail to find

From Mr Richard Exworthy

Sir, Mr John Murphy (letter, April 2) bemoans the poor state of leadership and standard set by those in positions of trust and authority and asks from what source he should seek better examples.

I suggest that he looks at my two children, aged three and six. They seem less confused than their parents; understand each other better than their teachers; enjoy better health than their doctors; are incapable of real sin; possess more self-confidence than any psychiatrist; and have clearer thought than a guru.

Only with politicians do they compare. Children are self-serving, devious and never to be trusted. Thankfully they are such hopeless liars that we always know whether to believe them. It appears, however, that with politicians we sometimes have to wait until after we have voted for them before we learn the truth.

Yours faithfully,
R. EXWORTHY,
24 Agate House,
Denmark Road, Kingston, Surrey.
April 2.

From Mr Michael Allen

Sir, I am fortunate of the generation that has the answer to John Murphy's question.

It is — "within yourself".

Yours sincerely,
MICHAEL ALLEN,
44 Campden Hill Court,
Campden Hill Road, W8.
April 2.

From Mr S. J. Traynar

Sir, Mr Murphy despairs at the lack of a good role model for his life.

Try Jesus!

Yours faithfully,
S. J. TRAYNAR,
74 Conrad Road, Witham, Essex.
April 2.

Small is beautiful

From Mr Alan Millard

Sir, Thank you for featuring Rutland (report and photographs, March 31) with its delightful motto *Multum in parvo* — a lot in a little. As I am only five feet four inches tall, with a tendency towards roundity, I have decided to adopt the motto for myself.

Yours sincerely,
ALAN MILLARD,
8 Medina Court,
Marine Parade West,
Lee-on-the-Solent, Hampshire.
April 1.

Bit of a mix-up

From Mrs Rae Michaelis

Sir, Atheists and physicists perhaps share the same confusion (letters, March 19, 25, 27). Niels Bohr, the Danish nuclear physicist and Nobel prizewinner, often shared his favourite story as follows:

A physicist hung a horseshoe on the door of his laboratory. His surprised colleagues asked whether he thought it would bring him luck in his experiments. "No, I don't believe in superstitions," he said, "but I have been told that it works even if you don't believe in it."

Yours faithfully,
RAE MICHAELIS,
Lynfield,
2d Lynwood Grove, Orpington, Kent.
April 1.

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SATURDAY APRIL 5 1997

DTI may launch Maid share deal inquiry



Wagner: company is target

By ROBERT MILLER

THE Department of Trade and Industry is understood to be considering an investigation into share deals in Maid, the online information company.

Since Maid made its stock market debut in 1994 the company's share price has been as low as 45p and as high as 354p. Yesterday Maid shares closed up 4p at 204p. The Trade and Industry Department is believed to have been passed the Maid file after an investigation by the Stock Exchange.

Under City rules the Stock Ex-

change's monitoring and surveillance unit automatically investigates any unusual share deals or price fluctuations. These rarely lead to any further action being taken.

If, however, market abuse is suspected the Stock Exchange passes the file to the Trade and Industry Department, which then decides whether to use its more wide-ranging powers to launch a formal investigation.

In February, Dan Wagner, 34, chief executive and founder of Maid, claimed that his company's share price had been forced down by sophisticated international short-selling. Between October last year and the

first week in February this year alone the company's share price went from 310p to 150p.

Mr Wagner said that he had made a statement at the time after ABN Amro Hoare Govett, Maid's broker, had noticed "a large majority of foreign share sales coming through companies based in Jersey, Monte Carlo and Lichtenstein".

It is believed that after Maid's share price fell and the company's statement the Stock Exchange began an investigation as it was bound to do. Last night the Stock Exchange declined to comment. The Trade and Industry Department said: "We neither confirm nor

deny whether an investigation is being conducted into an individual or a company."

Mr Wagner told *The Times* yesterday: "We would very much hope that the proper authorities will investigate these events. We are trying to run a business and a successful one. But we have become the target for share manipulators."

He added: "These people are damaging small investors who believe in Maid by spreading rumours that are untrue so that they can line their own pockets. What they are doing is not only illegal but immoral as well. The practice should be stamped out."

French no to bid by GEC for Thomson

By ADAM SAGE IN PARIS AND OLIVER AUGUST

THE French Government has snubbed a £1.2 billion takeover bid by GEC for Thomson-CSF, the defence electronics group that is to be privatised soon.

The French Finance Ministry said yesterday that it would refuse to consider the offer made last week by the British industrial group, claiming the sale of Thomson's defence arm to a foreign company would be contrary to the national security interest.

GEC said that the French decision was undermining European consolidation efforts in the defence sector in the face of a renewed onslaught by US rivals that had consolidated already.

Lord Prior, GEC chairman, said: "The fragmented structure of the European defence electronics industry will not sustain a strong competitive position in world markets in the next century. This can be achieved only through an integrated capability efficient in its operations and effective in the deployment of its resources."

French ministers insisted foreign groups were welcome, but only as subsidiaries. They emphasised President

Chirac's determination to see a "national defence charpente" emerge from the sell-off. The GEC rejection will be welcomed by the two French companies bidding for the 58 per cent Thomson stake, Alcatel-Alsthom, the telecommunications company, and Lagardere, the defence to media group.

Analysts said GEC's attempt to outbid Alcatel and Lagardere was a very long shot. But the dismissive nature of the Paris response is likely to fuel cross-Channel tensions. With President Chirac describing the privatisation as an essential part of European defence industry restructuring, many analysts expected Paris to consider, if not accept, GEC's proposal.

However, the GEC bid was seen by the Government as an embarrassment as well as a snub to GEC's French partner, Alcatel-Alsthom.

The French Government said it wanted GEC to open discussions with Lagardere and Alcatel with a view to participating in their offers.

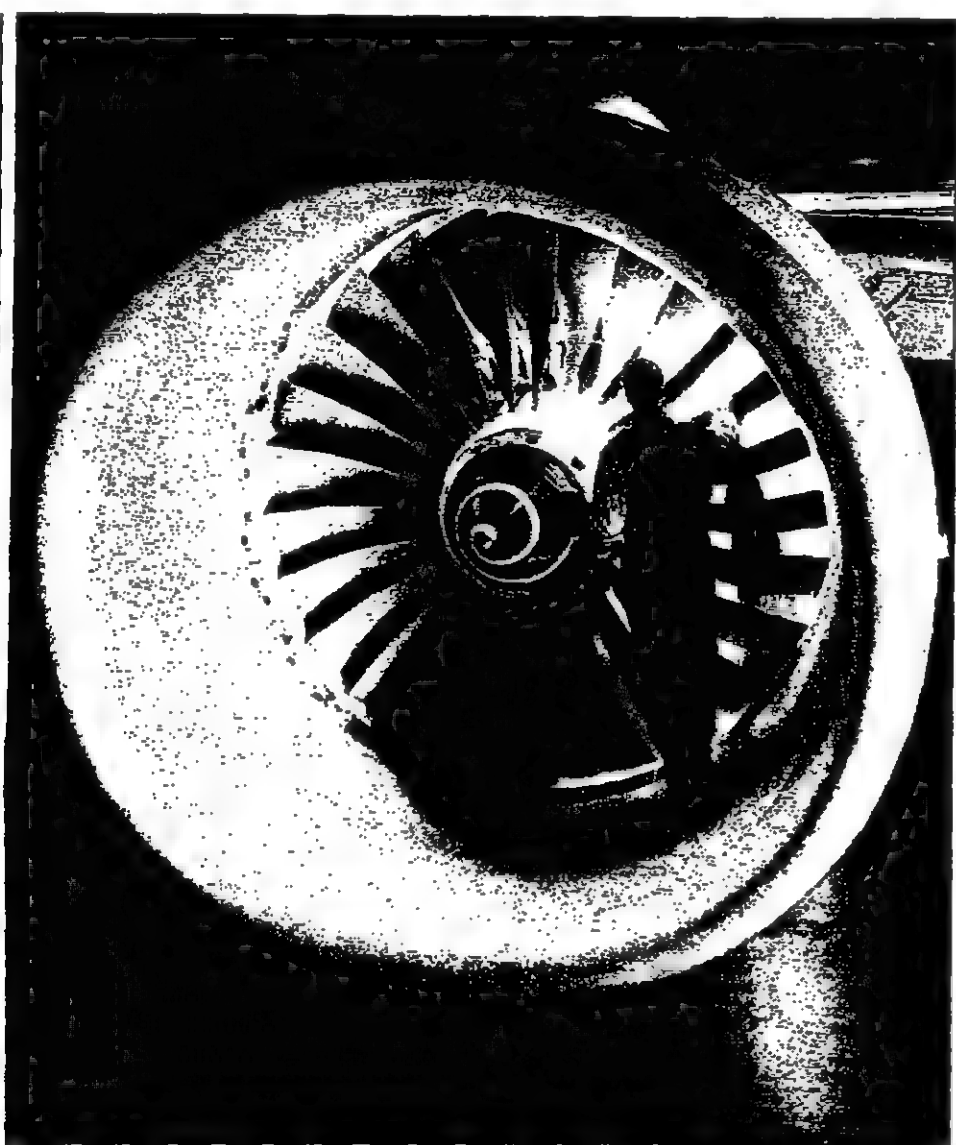
In Paris, analysts expressed concern that by adopting a stance that will be portrayed as intransigent, France could damage its chances of placing itself at the centre of European defence industry restructuring.

South Korea reacted angrily last year when the original privatisation procedure was stopped amid protests over a plan to sell Thomson's consumer electronics arm, Thomson Multimedia, to Daewoo.

In its second attempt the Government decided to split Thomson, hoping for a speedy and uncontroversial sale of the defence electronics branch.

The Finance Ministry confirmed that it would consider the bids by Alcatel and Lagardere. Alcatel has reinforced its chances by forging an alliance with Dassault, the defence group. Final offers are due by May 7, with the Finance Ministry saying it wants to make a decision on Thomson-CSF by June.

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Delta has selected Rolls-Royce's Trent 800 engine to power its fleet of Boeing 777 jets

Delta deal opens up America to Rolls-Royce

By OLIVER AUGUST

ROLLS-ROYCE has made a big breakthrough in the American market with Delta Airlines selecting the UK-made Trent 800 engine to power its fleet of Boeing 777 jets in a deal that could be worth £200 million.

Delta is the first US airline to select the Trent 800 engine for the 777 and the agreement could open up the booming American aviation market for Rolls-Royce.

A spokeswoman said: "This could have a 20-year knock-on effect. The Trent 800 was chosen because it is a superior engine. It is particularly welcome as it comes from Delta, which flies more customers than any other airline."

Last month Delta announced an long-term agreement with Boeing for firm orders and options for more than 600 aircraft, including options to purchase ten 777s. Rolls-Royce said the number could rise.

Rolls-Royce currently supplies the engines for about 30 per cent of the existing 777s.

The Trent 800, the version of the 800 series ordered by Delta, has completed its test phase and is waiting for certification from the US government.

Abbey pays N&P chief £700,000

By CAROLINE MERRELL

THE former chief executive of the National & Provincial Building Society has been made redundant from the Abbey National with a £700,000 pay-off.

Alastair Lyons, who was chief executive of N&P when it was taken over by the Abbey last year, is to become chief executive of another financial services company. His appointment will be announced this month.

Mr Lyons's pay-off represents more than two-and-half times his annual salary of £250,000. He had been with the society for six years.

Mr Lyons said: "I have always made it clear that I wanted to be chief executive of another company, having been chief executive of the N&P. I wanted to make sure that the N&P was fully integrated with the Abbey before making my move."

Mr Lyons said the post involved moving from Yorkshire.

Halifax targets savers with loyalty package

By CAROLINE MERRELL

HALIFAX Building Society has fired the first shots in a savings war triggered by the stock market flotation of four of the UK's biggest building societies.

The society has launched a loyalty package to secure the custom of its seven million savers that includes discounts on personal loans, special rates for existing mortgage customers moving home, holiday discounts and free financial advice.

Savers have effectively been locked in to the society since it announced its flotation at the end of 1994. They risked losing their share entitlement, worth on average £1,300, if they moved their savings elsewhere.

When the flotation was announced, the Halifax was paying interest at a rate of 4.5 per cent on £5,000 in its instant access account, and 4.65 per cent on a similar

amount in its 90-day account. The Halifax's instant access Liquid Gold account now pays 2.95 per cent interest, while its 90-day Solid Gold account pays 3.25 per cent on a £5,000 investment.

Higher rates are available elsewhere. The Portman pays interest of 4.5 per cent, while the Bradford & Bingley pays 4.8 per cent and Direct Line 4.5 per cent on instant access savings. A Portman saver gets 52 per cent more interest than one with the Halifax.

The Halifax says that its savers have been free to move all but £100 of their savings since February 24 and claims that there has not yet been any significant outflow of funds.

All societies are waiting to see what happens when the Alliance & Leicester makes its stock market debut on April 21.

Weekend Money, page 34

Eleven quit Capital Corp HQ

By KEITH RODGERS

ELEVEN head office staff have departed en masse from Capital Corporation, the casino operator fighting a £191 million takeover bid from London Clubs International, raising questions about the company's financial and management controls.

The departures, said to be linked to a dispute over bonus payments, leave a large hole in a department responsible for finance, purchasing, security, and general administration. The company, which has been without a full-time financial director for 18 months, employs just 30 people at head office.

The walkout throws the spotlight back on Capital's internal controls, which

Carry Nesbitt, the chairman, acknowledged were "unsatisfactory" in the 1996 interim report. Last year, the company called in independent consultants in an attempt to strengthen its gaming and financial controls. It has since indicated that the controls have been tightened up.

Although the 11 members of staff only left on Tuesday, the company insisted "they have since been replaced under our existing heads of department." It refused to comment on whether the replacements were temporary. A spokesman added: "This has had no impact on our day-to-day operations and it's very much business as usual."

Capital, which runs Crockfords, one of the oldest private gaming clubs, and the

Colony Club, has rejected the London Clubs offer as "derisory". Capital blamed a drop in pre-tax profits in 1996 from £13.1 million to £9.2 million in part on one-off costs resulting from consultancy reviews. The figures were also hit by low levels of high roller activity in the final quarter and exceptional costs from the temporary closure of one of its two casinos.

Yesterday, Mercury Asset Management, a major investor in both companies, bought 165,000 shares at 195p in Capital, taking its stake to 17.5 per cent. It sold 22,500 shares in London Clubs at 410p. London Clubs, whose shares closed at 408p, is offering 47 shares for every 100 in Capital, valuing each share at 191p. Capital shares closed at 200p.

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TT09

BUSINESS ROUNDUP

The first occupants move into BA's new building just before Christmas.

CALEDONIA INVESTMENT yesterday declared a supplementary dividend of 30p to mark growth in shareholders' funds. The payment will be made to shareholders who bought stock by the close of business on Thursday. A second interim dividend of 12.8p has also been declared, replacing the final dividend. This will make the total dividend 19p (18p) for the year ended March 31. Both the supplementary dividend and second interim dividend will be paid on May 1.

Clients who suffer loss are obliged to pursue all possible avenues before the ICA will even consider their claim. They must first sue the accountant. *If that fails, PII cover will usually kick in. If not, the ICA will consider claims — but only in the case of investment business. If fraud is involved, clients are left with nowhere to turn.*



Video lottery games could feature frequent draws and jackpots of up to £100,000. The business could develop into a £500 million-a-year industry, providing potentially huge returns for investors.

said that he wants to relaunch *Business Age*, the monthly title that brought him to prominence, in league with Anil Bhoyrul, his former business partner and his successor as editor of *Sunday Business*. Mr Bhoyrul left it in February.

The lease on the West End office, at 3 Cavendish Square, runs for six years, and has a rent-free period due to end

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A WORKING WEEK FOR: JERRY TAYLOR

Hanging on for a transatlantic connection

Eric Reguly finds that the chief executive of MCI is hungry to lead the street fighter of US telecoms into its £12bn merger with BT

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IT IS hard to imagine two executives as different as Sir Peter Bonfield and Jerry Taylor. Bonfield, knighted, cosmopolitan and impeccably dressed, is the chief executive of British Telecom, a company that is still struggling to shake off its monopolistic heritage. Taylor — squat, refreshingly unpolished, a US Air Force veteran and friend of Mike Milken, the notorious junk-bond king — is chief executive of MCI, the street fighter of the US phone industry that has bloodied AT&T's nose.

They are a potential culture clash in the making. Bonfield and Taylor have been thrust together to run Concert, the company to be formed later this year by BT's £12 billion takeover of MCI, America's second-largest long-distance carrier. Bonfield will be chief executive of the global powerhouse. Taylor will take the president and chief operating officer titles. There is no question about who will be in charge. "Peter's the boss," Taylor says without hesitation. But Bonfield will have to tread lightly. Executives loyal to Taylor will occupy many of the top positions at Concert and he will have MCI's interests close to heart. It has been his employer for almost three decades.

Taylor, furthermore, doesn't really need the job. BT's takeover of MCI will make him far richer than he already is. What Taylor spends on a single fill-up for *Odin*, his 50-foot sportfisher yacht, would buy Bonfield a year's worth of designer suits. Taylor is to receive some \$44 million for his MCI shares and options. His annual salary at Concert will be \$700,000. Telecom executives and analysts don't think melding BT and MCI will be easy. But they don't expect the cultural differences to wreck the union. BT, they note, is hardly leaping into the fray. It has owned 20 per cent of MCI since 1994 and spent a lot of time getting to know its people, products and strategy. "Friends & Family", BT's successful discount package, was an MCI invention.

While Bonfield and Taylor could have been born on different planets, it is also wrong to assume that BT and MCI are miles apart culturally. BT is competing in the world's most liberal telecoms market and has learnt to move quickly. John Tysoe, an analyst at Société Strauss Turnbull Securities, said BT was positively nimble in comparison to its old self. "BT, 13 years after privatisation, has moved a helluva long way from the regulated utility it once was."

Taylor agrees: "Peter Bonfield is more aggressive than many MCI people."

Taylor, 55, joined MCI, then known as Microwave Communications Inc, in 1969. He was its sixth employee. He was born in a small frozen town in Michigan. His father was an inventor who specialised in chemicals and developed the substance

used to kill the lampreys that wiped out the salmon stocks in the Great Lakes.

Like many young men of his era, the armed forces provided his escape route. He became a communications expert in the US Air Force, had a posting in Okinawa, Japan, studied physics at San Francisco State University and ended up teaching there. When the time came to find a paying career, he took a gamble on MCI. At the time, MCI had more to do with litigation than telecommunications. Taylor said: "We were a law office with an antenna on the roof."

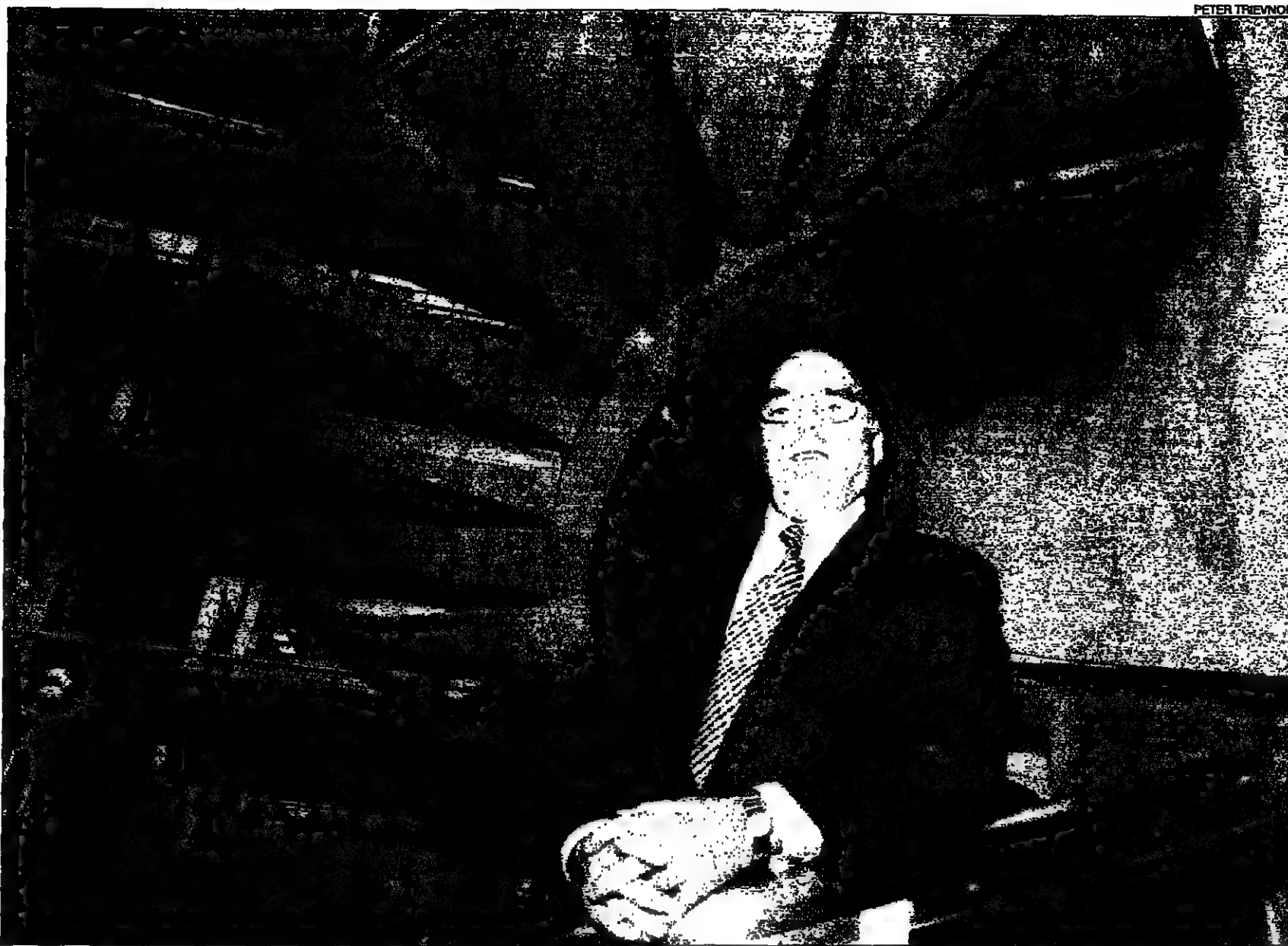
Indeed, mighty American Telephone & Telegraph, through its regional Bell companies, had a hammerlock on the domestic phone services. But the monopoly was always under attack. In the 1960s, regulatory changes allowed companies such as MCI to build networks in an effort to break into the long-distance market. It wasn't easy.

The Bell companies were not about to let a business they had owned since the turn of the century slide away and, in that great American tradition, they defended their turf in the courts. "We had a lot of lawsuits," Taylor remembers. "Once in Texas, the Bell company disconnected our business on the grounds that our service was not authorised — not authorised by them, that is."

Although MCI scored a string of court victories, it was never confident about its future in the early years. Every business customer — it had no residential business at the time — was hard won and virtually every spare dollar went to finance lawsuits. The company, which raised \$30 million in its 1972 flotation, had a negative net worth throughout the 1970s.

Taylor nonetheless was having the time of his life. In his first few years at MCI, he wrote the regulatory applications for operating licences, then switched to the sales side. MCI was enjoying its underdog status and captured the imagination of the upstart companies which loved to hate AT&T and the Bell companies. "The Government needed a catalyst for change," Taylor said. "We were successful in that sense. MCI galvanised opinion against AT&T. It was great to have them as an enemy." (An anti-trust suit filed by the Justice Department in the mid-1970s succeeded in breaking AT&T into a long-distance company and seven regional "Baby Bells".) By the early 1980s, MCI no longer feared it would go out of business. It expanded its networks, developed its brand image and recruited its first residential customers. But it was still a bit player.

One man and one financial instrument would catapult MCI into the big league. In the early 1980s MCI was introduced to Michael Milken, of Drexel Burnham Lambert, the investment firm that was to become the most profitable player on Wall Street through the judicious use of junk bonds, high-yield corporate bonds that could turn a corporate mouse into a



Jerry Taylor is looking forward to trying to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Telecommunications Act, which Congress passed last year

tiger. Milken used them to transform American industry and he did the same for MCI. He raised \$2.7 billion for the company in the mid-1980s, giving it the financial might to challenge AT&T's dominance in international telecoms. "We certainly would not have got that kind of capital without him," Taylor said.

Milken's party ended in 1990 when he pleaded guilty to violating securities laws to settle the Justice Department's racketeering case. Milken went to prison, but the fallen hero was not forgotten by Taylor and Bert Roberts, MCI's chairman. Taylor says he has been an adviser to MCI from time to time.

MCI continued to grow in the early 1990s, becoming a well-known consumer name through relentless advertising. The company made a \$1 billion investment in The News Corporation in 1995. News Corp is the parent company of *The Times*. Concert will inherit this investment when the BT-MCI merger receives regulatory approval, expected in the autumn.

Since then a fresh round of regulatory changes has presented it with another opportunity — one so big it could make or break MCI's fortunes. In early 1996, Congress passed the Telecommunications Act, the most radical and sweeping piece

of telecoms legislation since the dismantling of AT&T.

The Act is designed to eliminate the industry's remaining trade barriers, allowing the long-distance carriers, the regional and local phone companies and the cable companies to compete in each other's markets. Before its passage, MCI, AT&T and Sprint, the three main long-distance operators, could not provide local phone calls.

The Act was supposed to trigger a free-for-all. The reality is that developing new networks, prising open the local monopolies that still exist, negotiating intercon-

nection fees with those companies and taking the stubborn ones to court will take years and billions of dollars. MCI, in effect, faces a repeat of the war that it fought in the Sixties and Seventies. And this time, it could not do it alone.

Enter BT. Taylor said BT would not actually finance MCI's push into local markets. But having BT as its owner will remove the pressure on MCI to report ever-increasing earnings. It can, in other words, invest as little or as much as it wants without the irritation of public shareholders breathing down its neck.

Taylor could easily call it a day and devote his time to marlin fishing and scuba diving, his two favourite activities. As tempting as it is, he is not ready. He has agreed a three-year contract with

Concert and said he was looking forward to transforming it, through MCI, into a serious player in the local market. "I don't see this as the end of my career," he said. "I see it as a huge opportunity to carry on, building up an international partnership with BT and getting into local markets in America. This is exciting. Who would not want to be part of it? I love action."

The City is looking forward to Concert's launch and thinks it has a good chance of achieving its goals if BT and MCI can merge their operations and cultures without too many snags. Tysoe, of Strauss Turnbull, said: "There's such a large market to go after worldwide. These guys deserve to get their butts kicked if they spend their time squabbling with each other instead."

HIDDEN ASSETS

Opulent reminder of when banks projected their might

Cashing a cheque on the way to the Ritz Hotel can be an exotic experience. A clutch of bank buildings in Piccadilly built by the architect of the Dorchester, William Curtis Green (1875-1960), offers the passer-by a chance to step into a world set utterly apart from ordinary high street bank branches. On the corner of Arlington Street and Piccadilly, at No 160, is a branch of Barclays Bank designed by Curtis Green that is a luxurious oriental world of whimsy. Four Venetian red lacquered columns glow with reflected light against black lacquered counters picked out in gold. The surface of the central desk is red and covered with oriental scenes, and high on a side wall hangs a red and gold chinoiserie panel.

Opposite Barclays, at No 63 Piccadilly on the corner of Albemarle Street, is Curtis Green's branch of the National Westminster, built in the late 1920s and refurbished last year. This is an unusually tall street facade, but Curtis Green has managed to articulate it successfully with the help of borrowed models from the Italian Renaissance. The ground floor level is arched in the style of an Italian palazzo and the stonework of the door frames and the cornice is decorated with elaborate rose devices. Curtis Green inserted a tall mezzanine level, and for the top three floors above the building's cornice incorporated a loggia worked with an elaborate band with balcony.

The building is thoroughly



The high ceiling completes the thoroughly classical interior

classical — its doors and railings with Italianate handles and decorations emphasise the strength and security that a bank ought to possess — and would not have disgraced the Medici family. Bearing a passing resemblance to the opulent city banks of East Coast North America of the 1920s (done in the "Big Bow Wow" style of Corinth USA), the new National Westminster, when it opened in 1928, with its large

grandiose interiors just visible from the street, immediately pulled in customers. Today the branch retains much of its splendid green and white checkerboard marble floor, a series of fine pendant lights and an elaborate Greek key pattern circling the high ceiling, and a striking modern tapestry by Tom Phillips. Magnificently spacious, this has never been an average bank branch.

The 1920s was a period when all the leading banks were involved in a mad rush to provide more branches and attract more customers. Competition was intense, particularly on this stretch of Piccadilly. Curtis Green had only recently converted the glamorous Wolseley Motor Car showroom at 160 Piccadilly into his celebrated Barclays Bank branch. And Sir Edwin Lutyens had designed an exquisite little branch for the Midland Bank on the corner of St James's, with two rooms set aside for ladies and American visitors, and fitted out in a sober country-house Georgian style with reproduction walnut furniture.

The prevailing wisdom of the day was that bank buildings should reflect the monumental wealth and security of their occupiers. Architects were asked to build in an appropriately noble style.

Curtis Green built two banks in Piccadilly in the 1920s and Stratton House a little further along the street. The climax of his career was the commission to build the Dorchester in 1930. But more Londoners will remember him for his bank branches. As Professor C. H. Reilly wrote in the *Architectural Review* in 1927, his bank interiors were delightful. "There is none of the sense of depression which our bank interiors are generally so careful to provide. To be told one was overdrawn in Mr Curtis Green's bank would merely produce a laugh, and how much better."

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UNDER WAY 31

Self-assessed tax marathon up and running

WEEKEND MONEY

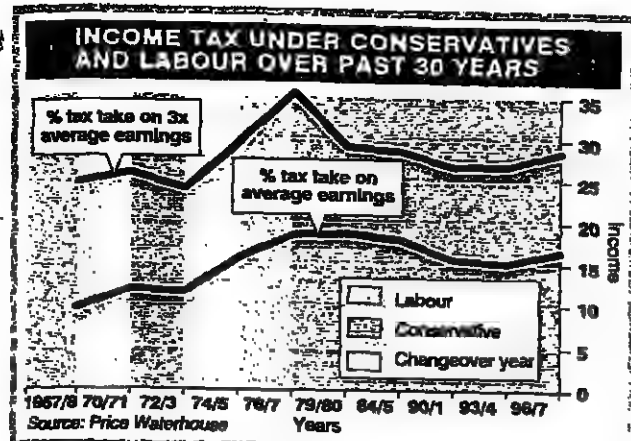
ROLLERCOASTER 33

Investors should prepare for a bumpy ride



THE TIMES: PERSONAL FINANCE NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

Manifestos launched with a query



Marianne Curphey and Nathan Yates on the real story of taxation in the past 30 years



Taxation, the role of the family and greater personal financial independence have emerged as key themes of an election campaign that started in earnest this week with the launch of the main parties' manifestos.

Both Labour and the Tories are keen to present themselves as supporters of low taxation and encouragers of enterprise and self-reliance. But a survey carried out exclusively for *The Times* by Price Waterhouse, the accountants, shows that on past performance both main parties have presided over rises in direct taxation during the past 30 years. Focusing on headline rates of direct tax can, and has, distracted voters from significant changes in allowances, tax bands and indirect taxes, according to Price Waterhouse. All such details are conspicuously absent in the manifestos.

Promises of lower headline rates from the two main parties appear prominently. Labour's challenge is to bury once and for all its "tax and spend" image and to reassure voters that it can deliver economic stability. Having promised to peg the standard and upper rates of income tax as an election pledge, Labour

has given notice in its election manifesto that it would be looking elsewhere for the money to fund its spending plans, namely a windfall levy on the privatised utilities. The party also announced a long-term objective of a 10p starting rate for income tax.

The Tories, as part of their attempt to appeal to voters on their record, remind them that the basic rate of tax has fallen from 33p to 23p during the Tories' 18-year reign. The Conservatives' aim is to get the basic rate down to 20p.

The Government also managed to spring a surprise with the pledge of a £1.2 billion tax break for 1.8 million married couples with children or dependent relatives. The tax break will be worth on average £700 per family and will allow married couples where one spouse does not work or earns less than his or her personal allowance to transfer some or part of his or her tax-free allowance to the working spouse.

But while the two main parties have pledged not to raise headline rates they have been more vague about indirect taxes. Changes to mortgage interest relief, personal allowances and windfall taxes can make a

significant difference to the disposable income of savers and borrowers.

Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, has refused to match Labour's commitment to rule out the extension of VAT to food, children's clothes, books, newspapers or transport. Labour, however, has been vague about the new "individual savings account" it plans to introduce. It says only that it will "review the corporate and capital gains tax regimes to see how the tax system can promote greater long-term investment". But it has pledged to reduce VAT on fuel to 5 per cent.

The Liberal Democrats have taken a different tack on direct tax rates. Paddy Ashdown, the party leader, has taken the controversial step of promising to put a penny on income tax to pay for improved education.

But if, as the Tories insist, political parties should be judged on their record, there could be a salutary lesson to be learnt from the tax policies of the past. Price Waterhouse's survey for *The Times* tells the real story of income tax under Labour and Conservative Governments of the past 30 years. Taking into account factors such as personal allow-

ances, the survey shows how two families of four on different income levels would have fared. A family on average earnings under Harold Wilson's Government in 1967 lost 9.9 per cent of the breadwinner's salary in income tax. The same family today loses 16.3 per cent—an overall rise of 6.4 per cent.

For a family on three times' average earnings the period. In 1967 this family lost 24.7 per cent of its income in direct tax, whereas today the figure is 28.1 per cent—an overall 3.4 per cent extra to the Inland Revenue. Although the

Conservative Party faithful can point out that the basic headline rate of income tax has been cut from 33 per cent to 23 per cent, a look behind the headlines tells quite a different story.

John Major may claim that this is the party of tax cuts, but Price Waterhouse's analysis of income tax since the last change of administration in 1979 demonstrates that the real reduction for a family with average earnings has been just 2 per cent.

The fall has been from an 18.3 per cent tax under James Callaghan to 16.3 per cent today. The higher-earning family has received a more substantial cut from 34.8 per

cent to 28.1 per cent, though this needs to be balanced against increases in indirect taxes.

But, for those on their way to the ballot box, the story of Labour's effect on income tax could cause greater jitters. When Harold Wilson's Labour Party swept to power in 1964 after 13 years of Tory rule, one of the first actions of his Chancellor, James Callaghan, was to raise the standard rate of income tax by 6d (2.5p). And in 1974 another Labour election victory was followed by a 3p rise in all income tax rates.

Our survey shows that between 1974 and 1977 Labour consistently raised direct tax levels. The burden on a family

earning three times the average was pushed from 24 per cent to its highest ever at 34.8 per cent. More surprisingly, the family on average earnings also lost out under Chancellor Denis Healey. By 1979 he had raised his income tax outlay to 18.5 per cent, another all-time high.

The spectre of the Healey years, with their high income tax, high inflation and the humiliation of IMF intervention, may well haunt Tony Blair as the country gears up for polling day. But according

to John Whiting, head of personal tax at Price Waterhouse, using your vote to prevent tax rises is likely to be difficult.

"Our survey shows that income tax has risen over the past 30 years, particularly for those on average earnings, and general taxation has risen even further," he said. "Whichever party wins the election, it will struggle to restrict this trend, and the most voters can hope for is some degree of choice in how the extra taxes will be levied."

WEEKEND MONEY is edited by Anne Ashworth

HOW THE PARTY PROMISES COMPARE

THE CONSERVATIVES

■ Tax and saving. Aim to cut basic rate of tax to 20p over the next Parliament and maintain maximum tax rate of 40p. Ability to transfer personal allowances between married couples looking after dependent children. Inheritance tax threshold to be raised "when prudent to do so". Development of existing tax breaks on Peps and Tessas. Expansion of employee share ownership, including a new Share Match Scheme giving employees free shares if they take a stake in their company.

■ Pensions and long-term care. Radical revamp of the state pension system, transferring the next generation of contributions into private plans. Contributions to be

made out of taxed income, but pensions to be received tax free. Easier setting up of group personal pensions for small businesses. More flexibility for people to continue to contribute to personal pensions after moving to jobs with company schemes. Long-term care costs to be funded by private insurance in return for more family retention of assets.

LABOUR

■ Tax and saving. No increase in basic or top tax rates. Long-term objective to cut the starting rate of tax to 10p. VAT on fuel cut to 5 per cent. Further linking of the tax and benefit systems. New individual savings account and extension of Peps and Tessas.

Review of capital gains tax system. Further encouragement of employee share ownership plans.

■ Pensions and long-term care. Basic state pension to be retained and increased in line with prices. Second-tier stakeholder pensions invested in private pension plans for non-members of company schemes. A new "citizenship" pension for carers. Tighter regulation of personal pensions with reform of the Financial Services Act. Implementation of pension splitting on divorce. Establishment of a royal commission on long-term care funding.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

■ Tax and saving. An income tax rate of 50 per cent for those

who earn more than £100,000, and an extra 1p on the basic rate of tax, bringing it to 24p. An increase in the personal tax allowance by £200. The party has no plans to change inheritance tax or capital gains tax rates. It intends to maintain tax exempt special savings accounts and personal equity plans, and plans the introduction of a save-as-you-earn scheme.

■ Pensions and long-term care. Encouragement of personal pensions, portable pensions and long-term care provisions. Reinforcement of consumer and investor protection, alongside independent regulation.

SARA MCCONNELL, CAROLINE MERRELL

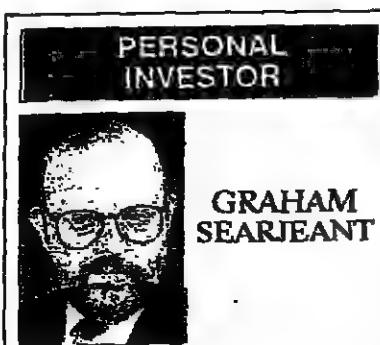
Dividends are in danger

Millions of small investors who are retired or have been cast on to the economic scrapheap depend on dividends to pay their bills. Fortunately, this half-yearly income has, on average, risen faster than prices, faster even than company earnings of late. That has cushioned many a household budget against the collapse of interest rates, which hit those who depend on savings. Few others cared much; lower interest rates being assumed by the borrowing classes to be an unalloyed social good. Uncaring forces are now gathering to attack dividends.

One advance party is the board of LucasVarity, the recently merged mid-Atlantic engineering group. It has quietly been canvassing City investors on the idea of abolishing UK-style dividends for a US-style programme of share buybacks. Peculiar circumstances make this more tax efficient for LucasVarity than for most companies. Even so, its shares have been weak of late.

Investors willingly forego income from a company that is in the development stage or growing so fast that it needs all the cash it can muster to invest. More mature companies, including LucasVarity, should deliver a regular return on money invested in them.

Share buybacks are not suitable for regular distributions. If all shareholders are included, as in the one-off arrangement at Iceland Group, it is too expensive. If a company just buys from institutions in the market, it is even more inequitable than buybacks by companies that do pay normal dividends. But it is convenient for manage-



PERSONAL INVESTOR

GRAHAM SEARJEANT

This reasoning has always appealed to Labour. It led to a costly mistake in 1965, when taxes designed to discourage dividends instead slashed ploughed-back profits.

The temptation will be great to raise vast sums by axing dividend tax relief for pension funds, blaming it for a "bias" in favour of dividends. This could also backfire. In any case, dividends are likely to become politically incorrect. What a pity. Dividends are higher and capital investment lower in Britain than in most countries, but annual dividends do not crowd out investment. The spate of share buybacks and one-off special dividends shows that finance directors are anxious to borrow more.

Investment is low because excessively high returns are demanded, because so many groups have cut back operations and retreated from peripheral businesses. After many bad experiences, companies with strong cashflow are now discouraged from diversifying. They should pay out heavily so that investors can recycle profits into new ventures.

That process is still not working well enough. But any attack on dividends would make things worse. Without a solid anchor of rising dividends, the market focus on stability and guaranteed growth in earnings per share would be even more intense and relentless. That would stop even more boards from taking long-term risks on expansion and propel even more to take the safer route of buying up a few more competitors. Dividends are healthy for all.

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Gavin Lumsden examines how new legislation will affect you and your workplace

Pension police switch to Opra beat

On November 5, 1991, the body of Robert Maxwell was found floating in the sea. His death sparked off an investigation that led to the discovery of Britain's biggest pension scandal. More than 14,000 pensioners saw their income dry up as a £400 million black hole was uncovered in company pension schemes in his empire. It took more than three years for the City firms implicated in the scandal finally to cough up £276 million to guarantee these pensions.

Pensioners such as Anthony Pearman, a former pilot with Maxwell-owned British International Helicopters, and his wife, Gill, had to subsist on a state pension for years and never recovered their full entitlement.

Tomorrow sees the overdue reaction to this debacle. Under the Pensions Act 1995 the UK's 200,000 occupational pension schemes come under statutory control for the first time. These schemes hold £600 billion of assets — equivalent to 75 per cent of the UK's GDP.

Ironically, the new rules follow recent government proposals for the wholesale reform of pension provision that could ring the death knell for occupational schemes. Stretching to 1,000 pages of dense legalese, the Act's objective of restoring public confidence in

company pension schemes is nevertheless laudable.

Yet sceptics argue that it is fundamentally flawed. Doug Johnstone, managing director of Johnstone Douglas, the employee benefit consultancy, said: "The bank that can't be robbed hasn't been invented. A skilled and determined robber will always be able to get past any laws you set."

Caroline Johnston, chief executive of the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra), the new watchdog, said: "We have a police force, but there is still crime. What the Act does is introduce more checks and balances to ensure the average scheme is run more effectively. What is also important is that in Opra it provides a place for people to report to if they think there is something wrong with their scheme."

Opra will have the power to conduct searches, start criminal prosecutions and levy fines on firms and individuals that breach its rules.

In particular it will punish firms that take contributions from employees' salaries and fail to put the money in the pension fund within 19 days. To delay will be to have committed a crime. One of the worst features of the Robert Maxwell scandal was the ease with which he diverted pension funds to support his ailing empire. In addition the



Anthony Pearman, a former pilot who has a reduced pension, suffered because of the Robert Maxwell scandal

Act obliges pension scheme advisers to blow the whistle when they find anything wrong. Perhaps the most shocking aspect of the Robert Maxwell scandal was the ease with which he diverted pension funds to support his ailing empire. In addition the

trustees. To prevent this the Act spells out that the duty of trustees is to the scheme and not to the employer.

Under Opra rules trustees are responsible for appointing advisers. They must also set out a statement of investment principles outlining the risk at

which members' money will be put. Another crucial aim of the new Act is to increase employees' knowledge of their schemes. Under Opra, employers must give new members details of the scheme within two months of joining. The Act also gives members

the right to appoint at least a third of their trustees from the workforce. Although many companies have gained their members' approval to opt out of this system, thousands of member-nominated trustees will this weekend be wrestling with their new responsibilities.

ities. Hugh Arthur, head of pensions at Biddle & Co, the legal firm, said: "Most company schemes already have strong member representation. The Act covers firms where there is none."

If members feel they have a grievance they must first go through the scheme's complaints procedure before contacting the Occupational Pensions Advisory Service. This is funded by Opra but manned by volunteers. If you are still not satisfied, your last resort is Julian Farrand, the Pensions Ombudsman.

Unfortunately, although the Act has strong anti-fraud measures, it will be less effective if companies go bankrupt and pension schemes are forced to wind up. The Act lays down a minimum funding requirement (MFR) that insists all occupational pension schemes work towards establishing permanent reserves that could pay off its liabilities immediately if needed. However, John Shuttleworth, of Coopers & Lybrand, believes the Government has set a dangerously low MFR, partly because so few companies do actually go belly-up.

For a free guide to the Act call the Opra helpdesk on 01273 627600. The National Association of Pension Funds has a series of 14 booklets at £10 each. Call 0171-259 9767.

Pensions reclaim Clarke's 1p tax present

Governments give with one hand and take with the other. From tomorrow the basic rate of tax falls 1p to 23p, as the Chancellor promised in last November's Budget. While this is good news for your wallet it will cut the amount of tax relief you get on pension contributions. Not only could this wipe out any benefit from the tax cut, it could leave you worse off in retirement if less money goes into your pension fund.

Governments offer basic tax relief on pension contributions to encourage people to put money aside for retirement. In the current financial year, which is about to end, the basic tax was 24p, as was relief on payments into pension plans.

This meant if you wanted to pay a net monthly premium of £100 into your pension you had to pay only £76 and the Government made up the difference. From next week you will have to pay £1 more to keep your pension on track. This may not sound much but has a cumulative effect, particularly as this is the second cut in two years — in 1995 pensions tax relief was 25p.

If you are a member of an occupational scheme, check your payroll for any change in the amount going into your pension. If you are an employee with a personal pension you probably pay into the plan by direct debit. Under the banks' clearing system rules, pension companies should contact you before raising your payment. If you pay by standing order, contact the company if you have not heard from it.

If self-employed, you will pay gross into your personal pension and reclaim the tax from the Revenue. From next week you will get back £1 less for every £100 contributed. It will still be possible to exploit this year's rate of relief in future. If your salary rises or you inherit a lump sum you can "carry back" contributions to previous tax years so long as you do not exceed the maximum (if you are under 35 it is 17.5 per cent of your wage). The amount you carry back will get the appropriate tax relief for that year: 24p for 1996-97, 25p for 1995-96.

GAVIN LUMSDEN

The key to unlocking cash set aside for retirement

Sara McConnell looks into a scheme for changing pensions to lump sums

People aged 50 and over with pension benefits frozen in schemes of former employers are being encouraged to transfer the funds to personal pensions and draw them immediately to unlock cash sums. But experts warn those tempted to cash in their pension early that they risk an impoverished retirement. Those who are, however, desperate enough for cash to contemplate such a step will almost certainly be able to get at their money without buying an expensive personal pension.

Inducements to transfer money from employers' pension funds are bound to rekindle fears of potential mis-selling of personal pensions. Hundreds of thousands of people who were wrongly advised to transfer from company schemes into personal pensions in the late 1980s are still waiting for compensation from insurance companies to make up benefits that they have lost from their employers. But in spite of the long-running mis-selling scandal, regulators have not outlawed transfers to personal

pensions, relying on tighter monitoring of salesmen.

Regal Partners Financial Planning, a financial adviser, has placed advertisements in the national press saying: "Release your pension! Is your pension locked? Are you aged 50 or over and not receiving your pension? You could receive a cash sum now! We hold the key!" The "key", according to Regal, is that holders of personal pensions are allowed to take their pensions any time after 50, while most employers' schemes have a retirement age of 60 or 65. Moving funds into a personal pension and taking the pension immediately gives access to a tax-free lump sum of a quarter of the fund.

The remainder stays invested, with income from it "drawn down" to provide extra cash. Paul Smith of Regal

said most of the takers for the scheme would be people who need quick cash. "It's for people who are about to have their homes repossessed or who need money for a new business venture."

Releasing a pension fund in this way is perfectly legal. But it could all too easily leave you impoverished, according to Billy Burrows, of Annuity Direct, the independent adviser and annuity expert. He said: "Pensions should be used to provide a pension and people have to understand that if they take the money now, they can't take it again."

Taking a frozen pension early also drastically reduces its value, said Geoffrey Wilson, partner of Excalibur Actuaries. He has calculated that a 50-year-old with a frozen pension of £5,000 in a year in a scheme with a retirement age of 65 could lose up to four fifths of

its value if he or she took the pension at 50. Poor annuity rates for younger people, and loss of investment growth and index linking reduce the value of the pension. Some employers will reduce the frozen pension before they transfer it.

But Mr Wilson's calculation does not take account of the often high costs of transferring the funds into a personal pension. He says it is unnecessary and probably more expensive for people wanting to cash in their pensions to use the "key" of a personal pension. "You just need to ask the scheme trustees if you can take your pension early. Company pension schemes typically offer retirement pensions reduced by 4-6 per cent a year for each year early."

Anyone who does transfer into a personal pension and is offered the option of "income drawdown" rather than buying an annuity should have a pension fund of at least £100,000 to reduce the risk of the capital out of which income is drawn becoming dangerously eroded, Mr Wilson said.

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MARIANNE CURPHEY
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They're off: marathon runners face just one day of pain while many taxpayers could be filling in their own returns for the rest of their lives

SARA McCONNELL

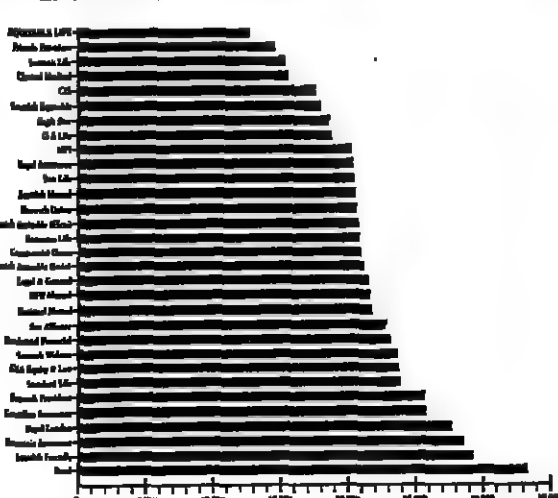
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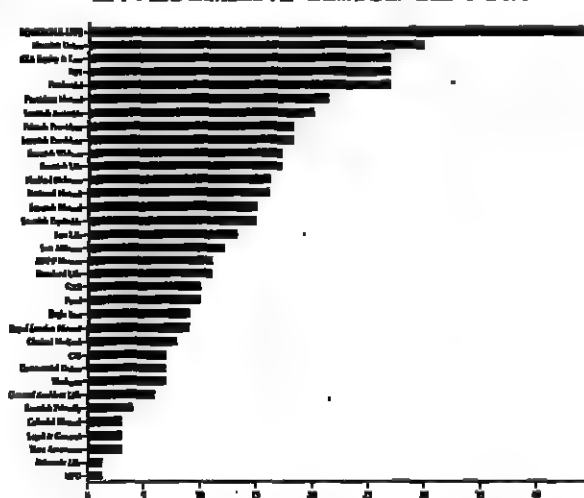
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Nathan Yates finds plastic paybacks increasingly attractive

Issuers scramble for credit card customers



Les McKeown has had the air tickets to prove that a quarter of a million loyalty points were more than just a gimmick

In an increasingly cut-throat card market, loyalty is at a premium, and issuers are increasingly ready to pay bonuses in the scramble to keep customers. Bank of England figures released this week show that high credit card use pushed net consumer borrowing to a record £122 billion in February. The month saw a 17.5 per cent rise in net consumer credit, the fastest since May 1989.

One beneficiary of the war among credit card companies for this spending bonanza is Les McKeown, a Belfast art gallery owner. He said: "I thought loyalty points were just a gimmick, so I never kept track of my American Express Rewards. But then I needed to send a team out to set up our new gallery in San Francisco. I had over a quarter of a million Rewards points by then, and I was delighted to find out that was enough to pay for their trip."

A report by Professor Steve Worthington of Stafford University shows in terms of total financial gain the best scheme is provided by Bradford & Bingley Building Society. On its Visa/Mastercard you receive a 4 per cent return on all your spending. For £10,000 spent, this adds up to a £400 payback.

With Bradford & Bingley's card the money must go towards paying off your mortgage, and you are only eligible for

this reward if Bradford & Bingley is your lender. For those who prefer to buy a car rather than a house, the GM card offers the next best rate of return. Here you receive 3 per cent of your spending, and after buying £10,000 worth of goods you would accumulate £300 towards a new Vauxhall car.

If you need neither a car nor a house, the most profitable option is American Express. Its Rewards system offers between 2 per cent and 2.7 per cent of money returned, to be spent in a variety of ways. Possible purchases range from flights to meals out, and one cardholder even paid for his entire honeymoon with Rewards points last month.

NatWest Bank's Visa/Mastercard offers between 0.6 and 2.5 per cent money back, which is the best loyalty scheme available from any high street bank. Its rewards are organised through Air Miles, one of the oldest loyalty systems.

Air Miles used to be spent on British Airways flights, but the range of rewards on offer has been expanded to keep pace with the competition. Air Miles can now bring you more diverse benefits, from days out with selected travel companies to hotel bookings. Perhaps their most unusual offer is a discount on white water rafting.

The Texaco Global Visa card reimburses its holders between 1 and 1.1 per

cent of their spending through vouchers that are valid at a variety of stores from Burton's clothes shops to Pizza Hut. After spending £10,000 on this card you will receive vouchers worth £110. The Goldfish card and the Alliance & Leicester Money Back card both offer a 1 per cent return on your expenditure, and a choice between these will depend on how you like your payment.

With the Goldfish card you will receive a discount on your British Gas bill or on shopping at Boots or Asda. With the Money Back card you will get your reward in straightforward cash, and Alliance & Leicester is the only company offering this direct benefit.

As well as the loyalty returns available on credit cards, there is also a range of non-payment schemes available from stores. UK citizens now carry 27 million supermarket loyalty cards in their wallets, an increase of more than 25 per cent in recent months.

One advantage of these cards is that they offer the opportunity to "double dip" into the rewards system. When buying your groceries, for example, you can use a Sainsbury Reward card to obtain a future food bill discount and at the same time you can make the purchase with American Express and add to your Rewards points tally.

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THE TIMES Matthew Wall

A blip

Bull looks like running out of

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Matthew Wall finds few worries among businessmen ahead of the election

A blip on the City's charts

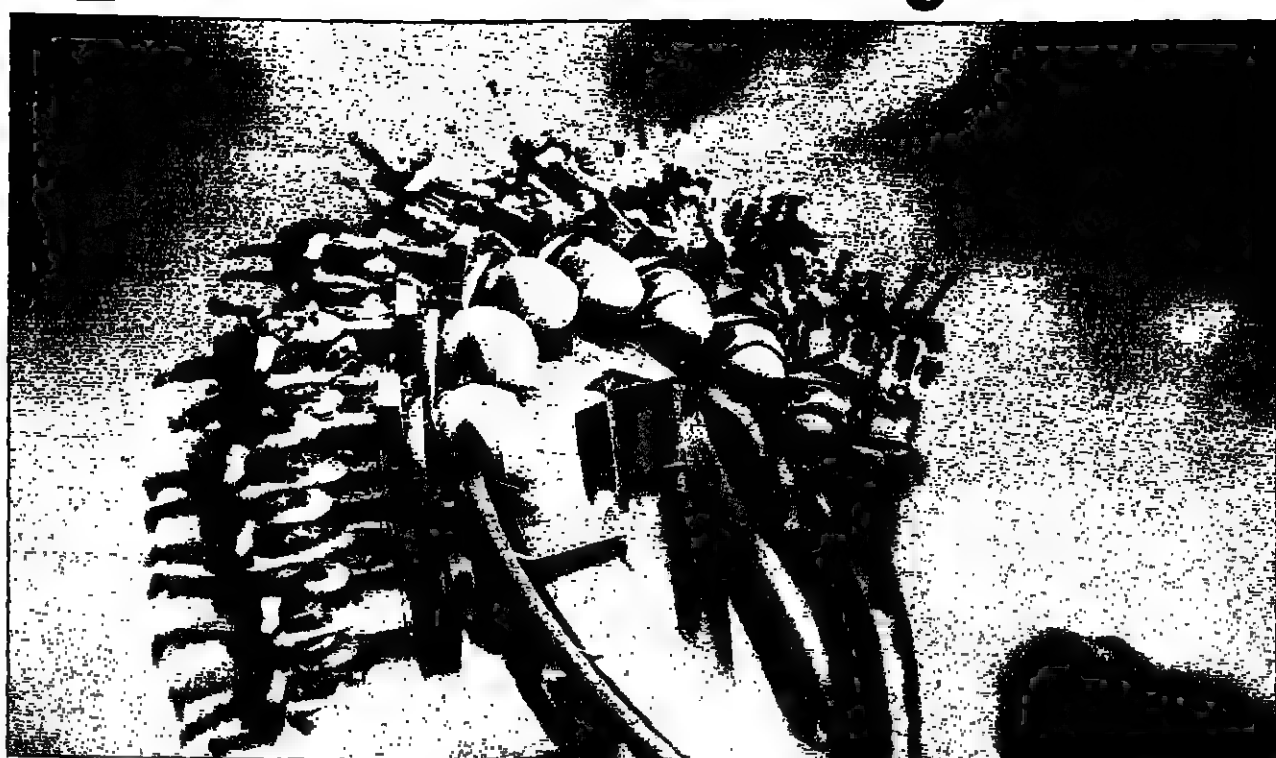


The message to investors this week, as skittishness on Wall Street took its toll on the UK stock market and the political parties unveiled their election manifestos to mixed reactions: "Please fasten your seatbelts as we will be encountering some turbulence".

The Dow Jones industrial average, the most commonly quoted US performance index, continued its slide amid fears that the Federal Reserve's quarter percentage point rise in the key US short-term interest rate last week would not be the last. Consequently the UK's FT-SE 100 index, which ended last week at 4,312.9, fell again and ended the week at around 4,237.

The Easter break exacerbated UK share price volatility as fund managers extended their holidays. Thin trading volume meant that fewer transactions had a greater effect on prices and this increased volatility added to the impression of nervousness and uncertainty in the run-up to the election.

But John Hatherley, head of research at M&G, the



Hold on tight: investors should prepare themselves for a bumpy ride on the markets in the run-up to the election

second largest unit trust provider with £16 billion under management, says there is actually a feeling of calm in the City.

"The market does not regard the Tory manifesto with anything more than academic interest. We've had a Labour lead of about 20 per cent since Black Wednesday in September 1992 and fund managers have been conditioned to a Labour victory for some time," he said.

"Indeed, the market began the year very strongly despite Labour's lead in the polls.

This election campaign is absolutely irrelevant to our asset allocations."

And one head of trading at a leading City-brokerage said: "The markets will remain fragile for the next couple of months and will become more and more volatile the closer we get to the election. But the long-term trend is upwards."

"Our view is that people shouldn't panic. Things are going to plan. The economic fundamentals look good in the medium term. As long as inflation is kept at a modest level and US interest rates do

not continue to rise, then things should be OK."

It seems that Labour's front bench Treasury team has successfully convinced the City that a change of government poses little threat to the market economy.

But concerns remain over Labour's lack of experience in office and the absence of specific policy detail. Despite such concerns, the last thing the City wants is the uncertainty of a small Labour majority or a hung Parliament. HSBC James

Capel, stockbrokers, is predicting a 140-seat majority for Labour and 4.25 per cent growth in gross domestic product (GDP) this year. Keith Skeoch, its chief economist, says: "Our GDP growth is at the upper end of expectations, but we believe the demutualisation of the building societies will give a further boost to the consumer-led recovery."

"We expect that a quarter of the £22 billion being raised will be spent by consumers. Given the net improvement in personal sector finances, con-

pled with improvement in the housing market, the economy looks to be in good shape. As a result there is a distinct switch in the market from financial stocks to consumer stocks."

This view is supported by record consumer borrowing figures issued this week. Net consumer borrowing exceeded £12 billion in February, boosted by vigorous credit card borrowing.

And the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) reported improved retail sales volume growth for the year to March 1997, with a balance of 33 per cent of retailers enjoying growth compared with 27 per cent for the same period last year.

Such strong figures make interest rate rises even more likely after the election, as the new government battles to keep inflation at its 2.5 per cent target level. However, the CBI does not believe there is a danger of the economy slipping back into the boom-bust cycle, last seen in the late Eighties and early Nineties, as some fear.

A new Chancellor will be faced with the problem of raising interest rates just enough to convince the bond markets that inflation is under control, but not so much that the markets would fear a slowdown in economic recovery.

While the politicians battle it out over the coming weeks, they will undoubtedly forget that the UK market is a mere bit-part player in the global economy, blown here and there by the vicissitudes of other more influential markets.

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Bull looks like finally running out of steam

At last it seems to be happening. After six years of its record-breaking bull run, the stock market has flown too close to the sun and is falling fast. What makes this different from previous setbacks, such as last summer, is that the mood of investors is changing and that could have some unpredictable effects. The Dow Jones industrial average in New York has plunged more than 8 per cent since its March peak of just over 7,000. Since the end of last week it has dropped more than 360 points, bringing it close to where it began the year. This is not yet on a par with the 1987 crash when the Dow collapsed 22.6 per cent, but it is close to the 10 per cent fall that would officially end the bull phase.

Wall Street analysts who until a few weeks ago were still bullish have abruptly turned gloomy. "The market is headed lower in the next few weeks," says Tom McManus,

equity strategist at NatWest Markets in New York.

Most professional investors seem to agree. The Federal Reserve Board put interest rates up 0.25 per cent a week ago and many experts expect two or three further rises as the authorities try to choke off incipient inflation in an economy that remains stubbornly strong. Higher interest rates are likely to mean weaker corporate profits, and the state of first-quarter company results due over the next few weeks is expected to be disappointing, pushing share prices down further.

The big worry is what small investors will do. They have poured cash into the market in the past two years. Already, the average mutual fund (the US equivalent of unit trusts) is losing money this year. If the market falls further, losses could become large enough to prompt a wholesale flight from equities by individual investors. If that happens, the

market will be in trouble, so everyone is watching mutual fund cashflows like a hawk.

On the plus side there has been little sign of panic despite the wild price swings of the past week. More money is moving into cash, such as money market funds, but it has not yet become a flood. The best strategy for anyone watching the US is probably to wait but keep your finger on the button. If the market falls much beyond 10 per cent in the next few days, it may be wise to get out fast because the fall could become a panic.

It is more likely that the market will stabilise and eventually start to move ahead again. The US economy is, after all, fundamentally strong. Corporate profits may fall, but companies are still generally healthy. There is, in short, no good reason for the market to crash or even decline much further than it has already.

RICHARD THOMPSON

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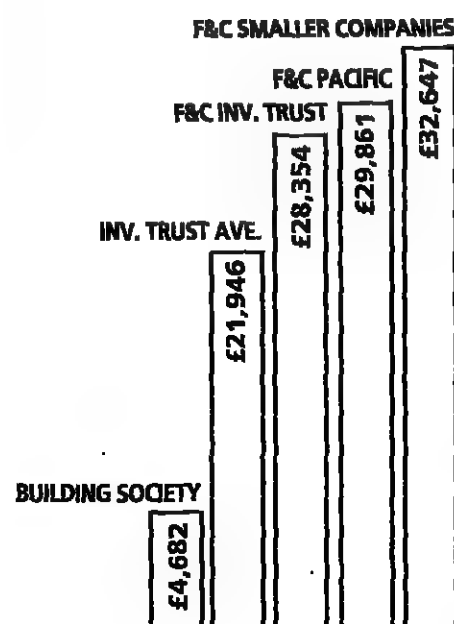
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Karen Zagor on the attempts to keep society members sweet

What price loyalty now?

Loyalty may be a precious commodity in the business world, but some building society members feel the rewards for fidelity are meagre.

David Elam, a freelance advertising creative director, has been involved with the Britannia for more than 20 years. Although he no longer has a mortgage with the society, he does have more than £10,000 in a savings account, thanks to the recent sale of a house. When the society announced how much it was distributing this year through its loyalty reward scheme, Mr Elam rang to find out how much he would get.

"There was huge hype surrounding the launch of the bonus and I expected to be bowled over, but when I asked how much the loyalty bonus was, I was told I would get only £24.37," he said. "I was underwhelmed."

Mr Elam also notes that the loyalty bonus is capped on savings of more than £20,000. "This seems rather at odds with the chairman's statement that the scheme takes into account the size of people's financial commitment. It's not that I'm money-grabbing, but I felt that promises were broken. And I wonder what it cost them in clerical terms to give me £24.37."

However, Mr Elam is unlikely to be the only disappointed Britannia member. When the society announced details of its scheme last year, it predicted average payments of £40 for the first year, which is not exactly the type of figure to win over the hearts and minds of members. In the end, the payout was even less generous, with average payments of only £35. The maximum payout was £500.

The Britannia was one of a large number of building societies forced to pass on profits to members to prove that mutualism was worthwhile after last year's glut of mergers and conversions, which left hundreds of thousands of society members richer through large one-off payments.

Nicki Lundy, a Britannia spokeswoman, says: "The bonus was never intended to compete with the windfall payments. We launched it to restate that we are a mutual society and that we want to give something back to our customers. It's not a one-off payment, and it can increase as customers take out more products or increase their tenure. We give back about one third of our business to members, and as our profits grow the real value of that bonus will grow."

The Britannia's scheme is based on a points system, where points are allocated for



Night watchman: loyalty used to be a highly prized virtue

tenure and the amount of money borrowed or saved with the society. Members then receive a lump sum. Mr Elam does not feel the loyalty rewards are sufficient to compensate for the fact that he is getting only 5.50 per cent for the money in his Capital Trust postal account.

Mr Elam may be relieved to know that the society is lifting its savings rates on Monday, when amounts of more than

£5,000 in a Capital Trust account will get annual interest of 5.6 per cent, or 5.35 per cent for monthly interest.

In contrast, research by Moneyfacts shows that Northern Rock is paying 6.65 per cent, with minimum withdrawals of £500, and the Coventry is paying 5.85 per cent on sums above £10,000. For instant access accounts, Bristol & West is paying 6.40 per cent. Alliance & Leicester

is paying 6.05 per cent and even Sainsbury's is paying 5.75 per cent on accounts of more than £10,000.

Some societies have opted to reward members by cutting mortgage rates or lifting savings rates. In the long term, this may be the best way for societies to prove that mutualism is in the best interest of members. The Nationwide, for example, is giving back about half its profits to members through better savings and mortgage rates. Its standard variable mortgage rate now stands at 6.99 per cent.

The society estimates that a family with a £60,000 interest-only mortgage and £10,000 in an instant access account would be £235 better off than if they were with the Halifax, £315 better off than if they banked with NatWest and £250 better off than with Abbey National. A spokesman said: "We can continue to do this because we do not have shareholders to pay dividends to, and we have recommitted ourselves to return a similar amount next year."

Bradford & Bingley recently announced improvements to its initial loyalty package. It now plans to offer savers rates that are, on average, 0.5 percentage points higher than competitors'. Its standard variable mortgage rate is a competitive 6.99 per cent, and there are plans to offer even lower rates for longer-standing borrowers.

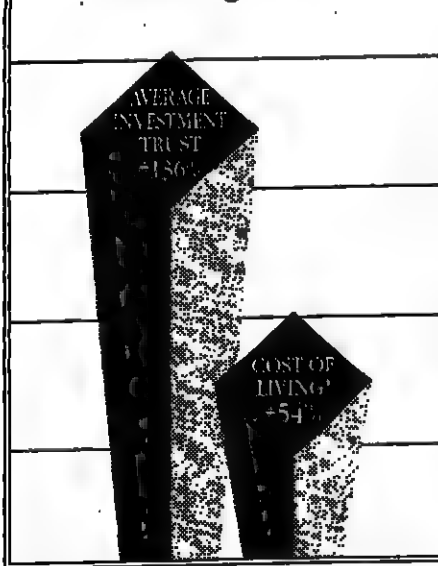
Others are also choosing to reward longstanding membership. The Coventry's standard variable mortgage rate is 7.25 per cent, but its Privilege Rate for borrowers of at least five years' standing is 6.5 per cent. National Counties' discount scheme starts with a mortgage discount of 0.40 percentage points for existing borrowers who have been with the society for three years or more. This is then increased by 0.05 percentage points each year for a maximum discount of 0.75 percentage points. In addition, the discounts are guaranteed for the life of the mortgage.

The Britannia notes that it gave away £6 million as a one-off mortgage discount to existing borrowers as part of its loyalty reward package. "We are not giving away more of our profits because we have no desire to weaken our financial strength. There has never been a collapse of a building society, unlike banks," a spokeswoman says.

However, Rob Thomas, building societies analyst for UBS, has estimated that societies could pass on two thirds of profits to members without harming their business. With this in mind, the Britannia and other societies have a way to go.

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Halifax woos its released investors

Halifax Building Society has launched a customer loyalty package aimed at trying to keep millions of pounds' worth of savings that have been locked in with the society since it announced its flotation plans more than two years ago.

The amount of shares each member received under the terms of the deal was related to the amount of money savers held with the society up until a certain date. Savers are now free to move their money to other societies that are offering more competitive rates of interest.

The loyalty package includes discounts on personal loans, special rates for existing mortgage customers moving home, up to £100 off credit card balances on transfer to Halifax Visa, holiday discounts and free financial advice.

To qualify for the range of benefits, customers need to have one or more of the following: a savings account, mortgage, salary-credited Halifax current account or shares.

The society is planning to mail its eight million customers with details of the new service. John Lee, group personnel and services director, said: "The purpose of the customer loyalty programme is to thank existing customers for their business and to provide added value."

Other societies in the process of floating are not planning to offer their customers the same sort of benefits.

CAROLINE MERRELL

No home, but hi

Shared eq
bomb tak

Shared eq
bomb tak



?

He says: "The letter was a total shock. I thought, well, the property isn't there any more so it's basically a paper debt [to

Mr Chatten believes he is the first to be taken to court by Fairclough for non-payment. But others may follow. Mr Chatten is just one of many at Clermont facing huge debts as Fairclough calls in payments for shared-equity mortgages. The developer offered the loans between 1989 and 1992 and growing numbers of residents can expect demands this year. But most have seen the value of their homes plummet and the equity, to allow them to borrow and pay off the debt, is minimal.



Nick Chatten says his contract was never fully explained

At the beginning of the 1990s, developers targeted po-

Colchester Borough Council's housing advice unit reports a number of similar cases elsewhere on the same

Lenders have also consistently argued that they are only in the business of providing information and should not be held responsible for advice. Even now, the Council of Mortgage Lenders' code of conduct, which requires lenders to be responsible for their advice, does not yet cover

He warned buyers not to be tempted into mortgages which rely on large rises in prices, saying: "This is dangerous. People mustn't take out deferred schemes as a method of getting a deferred property. If you are near the mark for getting a loan you should think twice."

SARA McCONNELL

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NU gears up for conversion

Norwich Union, the first mutual insurer to attempt a stock market flotation, is gearing up for the conversion vote on April 18. A total of 2.9 million members are being sent postal ballot slips, and the company is confident it will achieve the 75 per cent poll needed to approve its switch to a plc.

As with building society flotations, Norwich Union's move offers the prospect of big financial benefits for members. If it is given the go-ahead, it will issue 1.3 billion free shares at between 220p and 265p. This means the average payout per member will reach £800, and those with higher value policies can expect more.

If you have a non-profit policy your free share allocation will be fixed at 150 shares. A with-profits policy will be worth 300 shares, and 57 per cent of members will receive more depending on their policy's value. NU also intends to offer members options for more shares at discount rates.

Provided its members opt for the incentives, the insurer plans to complete its flotation in June. But only members who held life insurance, pension or annuity policies on October 1 last year will receive shares. Those who are eligible will receive their payouts on time only if they reregister

with the insurer before April 18. Policyholders can confirm membership by filling in their ballot forms, and even if you miss the registration deadline your assets will not be disposed of until 2006. But failing to register before the flotation would turn your shares into capital gains in the Revenue's eyes, leaving you vulnerable to CGT.

If the NU flotation move is accepted on April 18, members will be free to close their policies without jeopardising their payouts. But the durable nature of arrangements such as life insurance means that NU has an advantage over the demutualising building societies in keeping members.

Alliance & Leicester members due to receive shares are now free to move elsewhere, but those accepting cash must wait until April 21. Halifax savers must have at least £100 in their accounts until the conversion in June. Woolwich accounts should be kept open until flotation on July 7. Bristol & West members receiving the standard payout should retain a £100 balance until July 28. Those expecting the variable award should preserve their accounts unchanged. At Northern Rock the safest option is to keep at least £100 saved.

NATHAN YATES

Colonial names its price



Shares rush: the boys will be racing to fill their boots with Colonial shares closely followed by institutions

Colonial, the Australian financial services group, added to the free share mania this week with the announcement that 255,000 of its UK policyholders will get an average 1,000 shares and options to buy more worth about £1,300, when it lists in May.

Although the company demutualised in December, this is the first time it has put a value on its shares. Under the distribution, 10 per cent of members will get a minimum of 225 shares worth £290, although there will be no upper limit. A further 90,000 holders of personal pensions will benefit indirectly via their trustees who will receive the shares on their behalf. However, the offer excludes about 80,000 people with unit and unit-linked pensions.

Unfortunately, the shares will not be

Peppable as Colonial is seeking a joint listing on the Australian and New Zealand stock exchanges. To be eligible for Peps, shares must be listed in the European Union. If you are a policyholder with Colonial Mutual Life Assurance Society, you should have received a shareholder application form with allocation details yesterday. You have until May 2 to decide if you want to sell or keep the windfall. If you choose to sell, the company will cap dealing charges at 2 per cent to members.

You can top up your allocation to 500 shares and buy lots of 100 thereafter as 75 million new shares 77.5 million existing shares are being released to finance an Asian acquisition. Shares not snapped up in this offer will be made available to institutions. If the

price falls below £1.30 Colonial will refund the difference to members.

However, Colonial warned UK policyholders that holding foreign shares is more complicated than holding British shares. Retaining Colonial shares will involve some foreign exchange risk. The shares will be denominated in Australian dollars. If it falls against sterling, the shares will too. Dealing, or even just keeping tabs on the shares will also be difficult given the time difference. In addition, you will be taxed on the dividends paid on the shares: 20 per cent for basic-tax payers and 40 per cent for higher-rate payers. However, Colonial should do well in the booming European and Asian pensions markets.

GAVIN LUMSDEN

Act fast to Pep up your windfalls

Investors must act fast to avoid any pitfalls if they want to transfer free shares from demutualising building societies and insurers into a Pep (Gavin Lumsden writes).

The first step is vital for Alliance & Leicester members who have just one week to return their share forms. Alliance & Leicester members who want a choice of Peps must tick the option to receive

a share certificate, otherwise they will have to use one of the society's new Peps. Members of Halifax, Northern Rock, Woolwich and Norwich Union will face a similar choice soon.

Pep companies are poised to go on a feeding frenzy as £23 billion of free shares are distributed between April and October – under Pep rules all this money can be put in Peps on top of people's normal subscription limit of £9,000.

If you are expecting more than one windfall, choose a general Pep rather than a single-company one. But don't be coerced into exchanging your shares for units in a Pep by companies who are not authorised equity managers.

If you want to hold your shares in a Pep for a long time, only Fidelity, Henderson, John Govett, M&G, Mercury, Perpetual, Save & Prosper and Skandia will let you do so, al-

though they will make a charge for dividend payments.

Alternatively, you can use self-select Peps from Barclays Stockbrokers, NatWest Stockbrokers, Pillings and Killick & Co. Bear in mind that Pep providers are not keen to hold small bundles of shares because of the extra administration cost. You need to weigh the advantages of sheltering shares from tax in a Pep against the extra costs.

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WEEKEND MONEY LETTERS

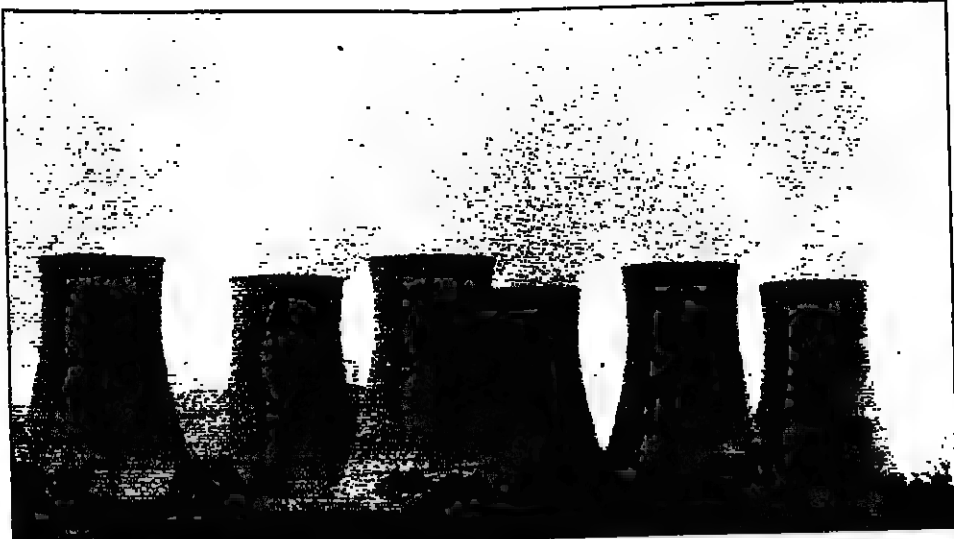
Pensioners are the victims of windfall tax

From Mr M.C. Fitzpatrick
Sir, There has been much recent comment (Weekend Money, March 29) about the windfall tax, whereby approximately £5 billion will be levied from the privatised regulated utilities (Prus). This £5 billion will then be spent on a three-year programme to put the long-term unemployed back to work.

While I would not wish to comment on whether Labour's overall proposal is sensible or not, it is worth examining the question of who will bear the windfall tax and how much it will cost each person affected.

There are about five million individuals with shares in a Pru; separately there are about 17 million members of pension funds, most of which will have something invested (directly or indirectly) in Pru shares. If the windfall tax affects the value of Pru shares, about half the UK electorate will be affected. But what long-term impact will the windfall tax have on Pru share values?

This firm recently published a Pru share valuation model; this suggests that a £5 billion windfall tax would, on average, lead to a reduction of



Shadow over utilities: windfall tax fears have already hit the prices of utility shares

about 5 per cent in the value of a typical Pru share.

They have, in fact, fallen by about 5 per cent during March (against a broadly static FT index taking the month as a whole). This fall suggests that as the scope and certainty of the windfall tax becomes clearer, the tax is now largely priced into the value of Pru shares. Does this mean that the 22 million people who directly or indirectly own Pru

shares will not lose out as a result of the windfall tax?

No — the impact of the windfall tax on a Pru shareholder is to cause a 5 per cent reduction in the long-term value of his investment: his shares will be worth 5 per cent less than if the windfall tax had never been invented.

An individual shareholder with £5,000 worth of Pru shares will have lost about £250, while a personal pension

plan with an underlying £10,000 invested in Pru shares will have lost about £500.

The moral of all this is that there is no such thing as a victimless £5 billion tax — but then whoever claimed there was?

Yours faithfully,
MAURICE FITZPATRICK,
Senior Tax Consultant,
Chantrey Vellacott,
Russell Square House,
10-12 Russell Square, WC1.

Share allocation at Norwich Union

From Mr R. Shah
Sir, According to the Norwich Union flotation circular, the free allocation of shares is to be broadly on the basis that "all qualifying members will be entitled to a fixed allocation of 150 shares, irrespective of the number of policies held" and that those "who have one or more with profit policies which receive a regular bonus will be entitled to an additional 150 shares" at least.

This, however, is in general terms. The circular does not contain any further details from which policyholders may assess for themselves exactly how many shares they should expect to receive. Admittedly, as the document goes on to observe, all qualifying members will have been sent a Provisional Statement of Free Share Allocation but such statement merely sets out the gross figure of the free shares, without showing how it is arrived at.

It is unclear why the Norwich Union management have shied away from including in the circular information on the precise formulae to be applied in determining the additional allocation. In this respect, the Woolwich conversion document is much more forthright, with its ready reckoner tables, while in the case of the Alliance & Leicester Building Society, its standard allocation of 250 shares poses no problem.

Yours faithfully,
RAMNIK SHAH,
Praveen & Co.
Solicitors,
Elm House,
113-115 London Road,
Mitcham,
Surrey.

Welcomed with open arms



From Mr D.M. Feingold,
Sir, Might I enter the ring to assist Frank Bruno with his choice of "tax haven" (Know a nice tax haven, Harry, March 29). Contrary to the information in your article, Switzerland (like the UK) can be a very attractive tax haven for non-Swiss citizens who choose to live there.

There are a number of special visa schemes for those with high incomes, which limits the amount of Swiss tax they pay to very modest levels. In addition, for a variety of international entertainers, sportsmen and super-rich, whose main source of income is outside Switzerland, bespoke arrangements can be made. A good example would be the late Richard Burton,

who spent the last few years of his life in Switzerland. Others include Jackie Stewart (the former racing driver) and Peter Ustinov.

Finally, if Frank wants to sample the Swiss lifestyle, without any of the above formalities, he can try Campione D'Italia. This is a part of Italy located on the lakeside opposite the Swiss town of Lugano, yet physically within Switzerland. No taxes of any kind are levied and he would only need an EC passport.

Round two to Frank! Yours faithfully,
DANIEL FEINGOLD,
Strategic Tax Planning,
UK & International Tax Consultants,
38 Clive Lodge,
Shirehall Lane, NW4.

Maturities at Britannia Life

From Mr Brian Millhouse
Sir, In response to the letter from Mr A.V. Purnell (Scots take their revenge, March 22), I fully appreciate Mr Purnell's grievance and am truly sorry he has been inconvenienced.

To ease any worries that this might have raised with our other customers, I wish to reassure all of them that the current situation in one of the Maturities Departments at Britannia Life is a temporary one. We have strengthened management within the area and anticipate being back up to date by the end of April.

The delay relates solely to policies sold by the Life Association of Scotland, a company purchased by Britannia in 1993. Maturity payments on policies sold by Britannia Life and Crusader (another company acquired by Britannia some years ago), are not affected. We have written to all of our customers who may be affected advising them of the situation and apologising for the inconvenience.

We will ensure that no affected customer is financially disadvantaged and all late payments will automatically include additional interest. Yours faithfully,
BRIAN MILLHOUSE,
Head of Customer Service,
Britannia Life Limited,
Britannia Court,
50 Bothwell Street,
Glasgow.

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Address

Postcode Date of Birth

Tel (home) Tel (work)

*delete as appropriate

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Equities end week on steady note

TRADING PERIOD: Settlement takes place five business days after the day of trade. Changes are calculated on the previous day's close, but adjustments are made when a stock is ex-dividend. Changes, yields and price/earnings ratios are based on middle prices.

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
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High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES				
100.00	99.50	ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	BANKS				
100.00	99.50	BANKS				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	BREWERIES, PUBS & REST				
100.00	99.50	BREWERIES, PUBS & REST				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	BUILDING & CONSTRUCT				
100.00	99.50	BUILDING & CONSTRUCT				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIALS				
100.00	99.50	DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIALS				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	ELECTRICITY				
100.00	99.50	ELECTRICITY				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	ELECTRONIC & ELECT				
100.00	99.50	ELECTRONIC & ELECT				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	ENGINEERING				
100.00	99.50	ENGINEERING				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	CHEMICALS				
100.00	99.50	CHEMICALS				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	DISTRIBUTORS				
100.00	99.50	DISTRIBUTORS				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	FOOD MANUFACTURERS				
100.00	99.50	FOOD MANUFACTURERS				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	ENGINEERING, VEHICLES				
100.00	99.50	ENGINEERING, VEHICLES				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	LEISURE & HOTELS				
100.00	99.50	LEISURE & HOTELS				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	HOUSEHOLD GOODS				
100.00	99.50	HOUSEHOLD GOODS				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	INSURANCE				
100.00	99.50	INSURANCE				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	INVESTMENT TRUSTS				
100.00	99.50	INVESTMENT TRUSTS				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	SHORTS (under 5 years)				
100.00	99.50	SHORTS (under 5 years)				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	LONGS (over 15 years)				
100.00	99.50	LONGS (over 15 years)				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	UNDATED				
100.00	99.50	UNDATED				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
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High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	PHARMACEUTICALS				
100.00	99.50	PHARMACEUTICALS				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	PRINTING & PAPER				
100.00	99.50	PRINTING & PAPER				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	MINING				
100.00	99.50	MINING				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	PROPERTY				
100.00	99.50	PROPERTY				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	TELECOMMUNICATIONS				
100.00	99.50	TELECOMMUNICATIONS				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	TEXTILES & APPAREL				
100.00	99.50	TEXTILES & APPAREL				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	OTHER FINANCIAL				
100.00	99.50	OTHER FINANCIAL				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	RETAILERS, FOOD				
100.00	99.50	RETAILERS, FOOD				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
100.00	99.50	RETAILERS, GENERAL				
100.00	99.50	RETAILERS, GENERAL				

High	Low	Company	Price	Change	Yield	P/E
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THE TIMES SATURDAY APRIL 5 1997

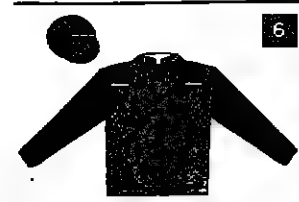
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GRAND NATIONAL RUNNERS, RIDERS COLOURS AND ODDS

TEXT BY GEORGE FOLE AND JAMES WILLOUGHBY



ANTONIN
Jockey: Conor O'Dwyer
Trained in Ireland by an Englishwoman, Sue Bramall. Returned to best with impressive victory in Punchestown National Trial in February but may be better suited by softer ground than he will encounter today. Eighth last year. Betting: 25-1



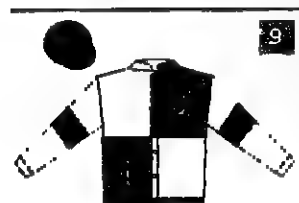
AVRO ANSON
Jockey: Peter Nixon
Former high-class hurdler showing an aptitude for fences, despite the blamish of unseating his rider last time. No doubting his quality and could well improve further, especially on his favoured good ground. Big chance. Betting: 10-1



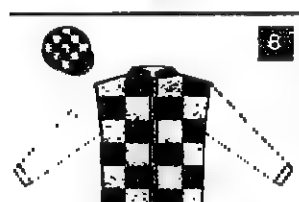
BACK BAR
Jockey: Tommy Treacy
Three times a winner last season but out of sorts this term. Latest effort, a distant last of four in a hurdle, does nothing to inspire confidence in a return to form. Weakest of the Irish challenge, back only at your peril. Betting: 65-1



BELMONT KING
Jockey: Richard Johnson
King for a day? Not implausible though this thorough stayer may need the rain to reign. Good efforts in handicaps this term suggest he will have few problems testing out the trip but the drying ground could be against him. Betting: 20-1



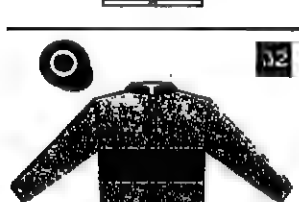
BISHOPS HALL
Jockey: David Bridgwater
Has failed to progress beyond the first fence in last two Nationals. Capable at his best but will need to cop the horses for courses theory in some style if he is to play a major role today. Bridgwater finished second last year. Betting: 50-1



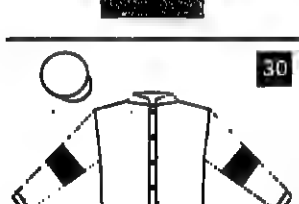
BUCKBOARD BOUNCE
Jockey: Paul Carberry
Carberry has faced a race against time to prove his fitness to ride in bid to emulate father Tommy, who won on L'Escapart in 1975. Comes to Aintree with the unusual preparation of having finished eighth over hurdles at Carlisle. Betting: 25-1



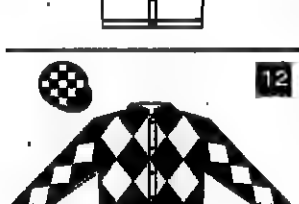
CAMELOT KNIGHT
Jockey: Cwl Llewellyn
The National would need to be a real lottery for this Camelot to show a profit. Mostly out of form this season and faces near impossible task from well out of the handicap. Number 34 most unlikely to be lucky for you. Betting: 100-1



CELTIC ABBEY
Jockey: Brendan Powell
Those tempted by the Abbey habit should invest their stake elsewhere. The better chance finished a fine fourth in the Foxhunting Chase at the Cheltenham Festival and should stay the trip but is well out of his depth in this company. Betting: 65-1



DAKYNS BOY
Jockey: Timmy Murphy
Formerly smart dyed-in-the-wool stayer, at his best when the mud is flying. Would need the heavens to open to ride the spunk of his younger days. Jockey is a rising star but faces a mountainous task to take a hand on this mount. Betting: 65-1



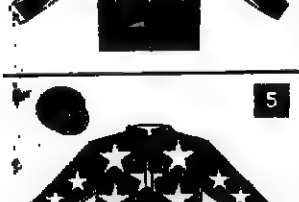
DEXTRA DOVE
Jockey: Chris Meade
Nicknamed Silver in 1961 was the last grey to triumph in the National. This bold-jumping front-runner could make a determined bid to put the record straight if he adapts to the course. First National runner for trainer Simon Earle. Betting: 33-1



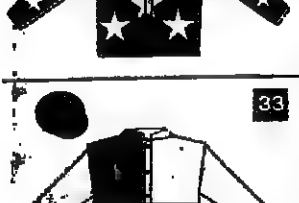
DON'T LIGHT UP
Jockey: Robert Thornton
Unlikely source to smoke out the winner. Without a run this year, and despite having won on his reappearance last season, faces a monumental task first time out in this company. Only confirmed optimists need apply. Betting: 100-1



EVANGELICA
Jockey: Robbie Supple
Little about Martin Pipe's achievements surprise but a victory here would be one of his more remarkable feats. Through stayer, although form is a long way short of this standard. Outside prospects at best. Betting: 55-1



FEATHERED GALE
Jockey: Francis Woods
Rerouted from the Irish Grand National on Monday, which he won last year, at eleventh hour in attempt to improve trainer's miserable Aintree record. His six runners have failed to complete the course. Second string to Wythe Hide. Betting: 25-1



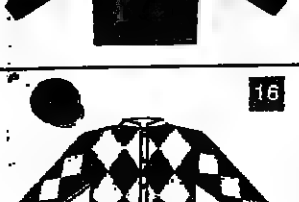
FULL OF OATS
Jockey: Jim Culloty
Unlikely to have enough pace to yield rich harvest, though a dependable jumper and thorough stayer in his own grade. Should plod on honestly but faces a stiff task at the weights. Other outsiders make more appeal. Betting: 65-1



GENERAL WOLFE
Jockey: Lorcan Wyer
Attempts to scale Aintree heights for trainer Tim Forster's fourth National winner. Disputed big-race favourite before poor run last time undermined case, but second in Scottish National last year proves stamina. Lively each-way hope. Betting: 20-1



GLEMOT
Jockey: Simon McNeill
Tackling the big fences in a good cause as owner Dennis Yardy will donate a quarter of any prize-money won to Sheffield Children's Hospital. Plenty to do here, though, and the general's nature is likely to go unrewarded. Betting: 65-1



GO BALLISTIC
Jockey: Mick Fitzgerald
Similar to last year's winner, Rough Quest, in that fine run in Cheltenham Gold Cup makes him well weighted. Clear chance, but less experienced than Rough Quest and confidence reduced by tendency to make jumping mistakes. Betting: 12-1

3.45 MARTELL GRAND NATIONAL CHASE

(Handicap: grade III: £178,146: 4m 4f) (40 runners)

1	10/P32-P	MASTER OATS 48 (BF,G,S) (P Matthews) K Bailey 11-11-10	N Williamson	80
2	21-6P2P	NAHTHEN LAD 23 (G,S) (Mrs P Hemmings) Mrs J Pitman 8-10-9	J F Tiley	80
3	214-335	LO STREGONE 42 (BF,F,G,S) (Mrs S Clegg) T Tate 11-10-4	G Bradley	81
4	F/1S1-51	SUNY BAY 42 (G,S) (Uplands Bloodstock) C Brooks 8-10-3	J Osborne	81
5	15-2605	FEATHERED GALE 34 (F,G,S) (M O'Connor) A L T Moore (ire) 10-10-3	F Woods	81
6	2125-3U	AVRO ANSON 63 (F,G) (The Mirror Punters Club) M Camacho 9-10-2	P Niven	90
7	1F5/P2	BELMONT KING 28 (S) (Mrs B Bond) P Nicholls 9-10-1	R Johnson	84
8	52/10-P0	BUCKBOARD BOUNCE 7 (F,G,S) (R Ogden) G Richards 11-10-1	P Carberry	80
9	01-241P	BISHOPS HALL 28 (F,G,S) (T Carroll) R Alner 11-10-1	D Bridgwater	80
10	231112	LORD GYLLENE 21 (BF,G,S) (S Clarke) S Brookshaw 9-10-0	A Dobbin	87
11	11U-021	WYTHE HIDE 34 (G,S) (J McManus) A L T Moore (ire) 10-10-0	C F Swan	93
12	5P114P	DEXTRA DOVE 42 (F,G,S) (Dextra Lighting Systems) S Earle 10-10-0	C Maude	82
13	30-1551	ANTONIN 48 (F,G,S) (G Bailey Ltd) Mrs S Bramall (ire) 9-10-0	C O'Dwyer	94
14	11F12-P	SMITH'S BAND 35 (G,S) (A Smith) Mrs J Pitman 9-10-0	R Dunwoody	85
15	F11300	NEW CO 24 (G,S) (Exors of Mrs L Ronan) M Morris (ire) 9-10-0	D J Casey	80
16	4121F4	GO BALLISTIC 23 (F,G,S) (Mrs B Lockhart) J O'Shea 8-10-0	M A Fitzgerald	97
17	11F2-14	GENERAL WOLFE 28 (BF,G,S) (Winning Line Racing) T Forster 8-10-0	L Wyer	84
18	4-12232	GLEMOT 113 (BF,F,G,S) (D Yardy) K Bailey 9-10-0	S McNeill	73
19	11-2553	VALIANT WARRIOR 14 (F,G,S) (P Sellars) M Hammond 9-10-0	R Garrity	75
20	5P5344	KILLESBIN 21 (G,G,S) (H Manners) H Manners 11-10-0	S Curran	68
21	50U-PP4	MASTER BOSTON 2 (G,S) (M Oldham) R Woodhouse 9-10-0	NON RUNNER	-
22	21-225U	STRAIGHT TALK 133 (F,G,S) (Mrs C Paterson) P Nicholls 10-10-0	Mr J Tizzard	72
23	POF01P	NUAFFE 38 (B,G,S) (J Doyle) P Fahy (ire) 12-10-0	T Mitchell	61
24	011-320	NORTHERN HIDE 24 (F,G,S) (Northern Hide Pnrs) M Salaman 11-10-0	P Holley	74
25	P3-1441	TURNING TRIX 36 (G,S) (M Davies) D Nicholson 10-10-0	J R Kavanagh	79
26	12223F	RIVER MANDATE 25 (V,G,S) (Anne Duchess of Westminster) T Forster 10-10-0	A Thornton	75
27	45U5P0	GRANGE BRAKE 26 (C,F,G,S) (H Mould) N Twiston-Davies 11-10-0	D Walsh	76
28	321142	EVANGELICA 79 (BF,F,S) (M Pipe Racing Club) M Pipe 7-10-0	R Supple	68
29	554004	BACK BAR 20 (G,S) (P McCarthy) A L T Moore (ire) 9-10-0	T P Treacy	86
30	4UQ/240	DAKYNS BOY 49 (G,S) (A Parker) N Twiston-Davies 12-10-0	T J Murphy	70
31	554-05F	SCRIBBLER 21 (G,S) (M Faman) G McCourt 11-10-0	D Fort	59
32	442/2-P4	CELTIC ABBEY 23 (F,G,S) (G Powell) Miss V Williams 9-10-0	B Powell	60
33	11-3F33	FULL OF OATS 35 (BF,G,S) (I MacDonald) Miss H Knight 11-10-0	J Culloty	67
34	Q/5P-248	CAMELOT KNIGHT 25 (S) (M Gates) N Twiston-Davies 11-10-0	C Llewellyn	68
35	3P2-045	MUGONI BEACH 43 (B,F,F,G,S) (J Ennis) M Pipe 12-10-0	J Evans	66
36	U223-36	PLASTIC SPACEAGE 49 (G,S) (G Dalziel) J Old 14-10-0	G Upton	66
37	1340-80	OVER THE STREAM 19 (F,G) (J Gordon & E Gordon) Miss M Milligan 11-10-0	A S Smith	59
38	35P/1P-	DON'T LIGHT UP 347 (B,G,S) (I Naylor) Miss V Williams 11-10-0	Mr R Thornton	58
39	32-10P6	PINK GIN 36 (F,G,S) (Mrs M Francis) M Hammond 10-10-0	Mr C Bonner	58
40	533B33	SPUFFINGTON 28 (G,S) (J Clapet) J Gifford 9-10-0	P Hide	58

Long handicap: Lord Gyllene 9-13, Wythe Hide 9-13, Dextra Dove 9-13, Antonin 9-13, Smith's Band 9-10, New Co 9-9, Go Ballistic 9-8, General Wolfe 9-8, Glemot 9-7, Valiant Warrior 9-6, Killesbin 9-3, Master Boston 9-3, Straight Talk 9-2, Nuaffe 9-2, Northern Hide 9-0, Turning Trix 8-12, River Mandate 8-12, Grange Brake 8-12, Evangelica 8-10, Back Bar 8-10, Dakyns Boy 8-9, Scribbler 8-8, Celtic Abbey 8-7, Full of Oats 8-6, Camelot Knight 8-6, Mugoni Beach 8-4, Plastic Spaceage 8-2, Over The Stream 8-2, Don't Light Up 8-2, Pink Gin 8-0, Spuffington 8-0.

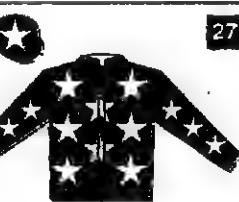
1996: ROUGH QUEST 10-10-7 M A Fitzgerald (7-1 fav) T Casey 27 ran

BETTING: Coral: 9-1 Suny Bay, Lord Gyllene, Wythe Hide, 10-1 Avro Anson, Go Ballistic, Smith's Band, 14-1 Feathered Gale, Lo Stregone, 18-1 Antonin, Nahthen Lad, 20-1 General Wolfe, 22-1 Belmont King, 25-1 Buckboard Bounce, 28-1 Turning Trix, 33-1 Dextra Dove, Killesbin, Master Oats, 40-1 New Co, Northern Hide, 50-1 Bishops Hall, Evangelica, Glemot, River Mandate, Straight Talk, Valiant Warrior, 65-1 Celtic Abbey, Nuaffe, 100-1 others.

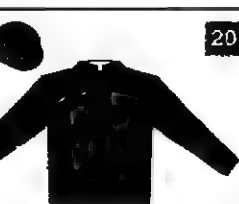
Ladbrokes: 10-1 Avro Anson, Go Ballistic, Lord Gyllene, Suny Bay, Wythe Hide, 11-1 Lo Stregone, 12-1 Smith's Band, 14-1 Antonin, General Wolfe, 16-1 Nahthen Lad, 20-1 Feathered Gale, Turning Trix, 25-1 Master Oats, 28-1 Belmont King, Killesbin, 33-1 Buckboard Bounce, 40-1 Dextra Dove, Evangelica, New Co, Northern Hide, River Mandate, 50-1 Bishops Hall, Grange Brake, 65-1 Full of Oats, Celtic Abbey, Glemot, Valiant Warrior, Straight Talk, 100-1 Nuaffe, Back Bar, Mugoni Beach, Pink Gin, 150-1 Scribbler, Dakyns Boy, Spuffington, Camelot Knight, 200-1 Don't Light Up, Over The Stream, Plastic Spaceage.

Tote: 8-1 Suny Bay, 10-1 Avro Anson, Go Ballistic, Lord Gyllene, Wythe Hide, 14-1 Lo Stregone, Nahthen Lad, Smith's Band, 16-1 Antonin, General Wolfe, 20-1 Belmont King, Buckboard Bounce, Feathered Gale, 25-1 Master Oats, 33-1 Dextra Dove, 40-1 Bishops Hall, Killesbin, New Co, Turning Trix, 50-1 others.

William Hill: 10-1 Avro Anson, Go Ballistic, Lord Gyllene, Suny Bay, Wythe Hide, 12-1 Lo Stregone, Smith's Band, 14-1 General Wolfe, 16-1 Antonin, Nahthen Lad, 25-1 Belmont King, Buckboard Bounce, Feathered Gale, Killesbin, Master Oats, 33-1 Dextra Dove, Turning Trix, 40-1 Evangelica, New Co, River Mandate, Valiant Warrior, 50-1 Bishops Hall, Glemot, Northern Hide, 65-1 Back Bar, Full of Oats, Grange Brake, Mugoni Beach, Straight Talk, 100-1 others.



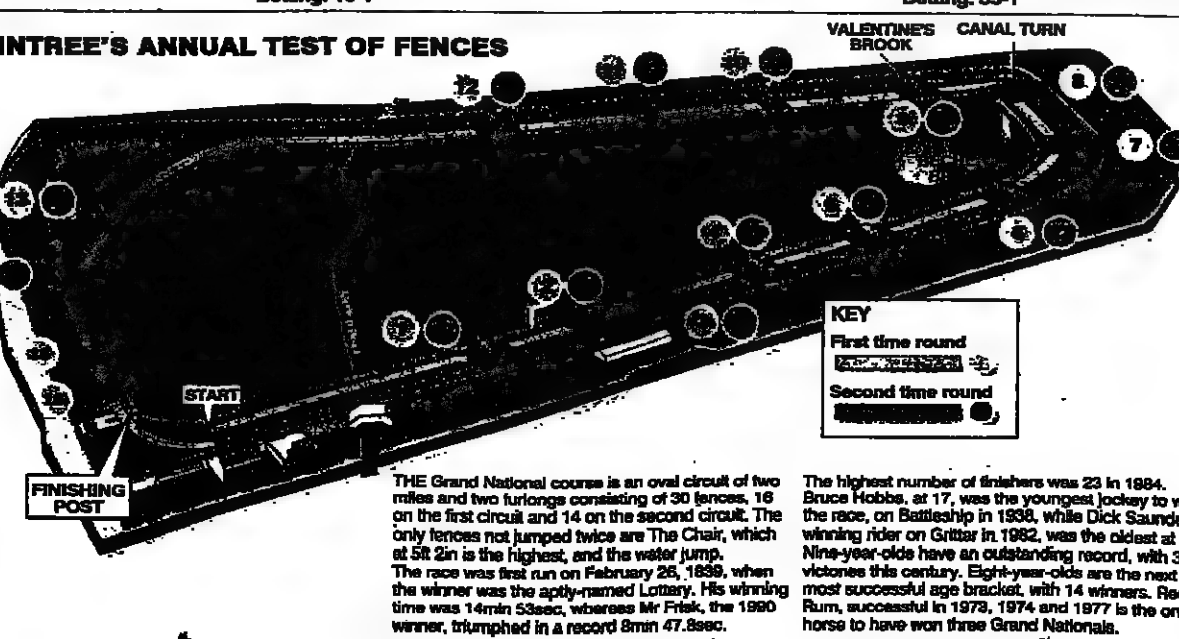
GRANGE BRAKE
Jockey: David Walsh
Unreliable customer with more poor efforts than good in his recent record. Capable of useful performances on his day though, and if the challenge of the National sparks his interest could go well at a big price. Betting: 65-1



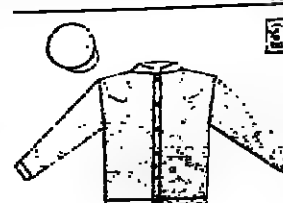
KILLESBIN
Jockey: Sean Curran
In excellent form last year but has struggled to recapture his sparkle this term. No doubts about his stamina, ground poses a far bigger problem. Well suited by soft ground, which he is unlikely to encounter here. Betting: 33-1



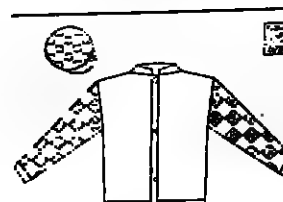
LORD GYLLENE
Jockey: Tony Dobbin
Sure-footed in three front-running victories this season but found out in broader class last time. Well handicapped and stays well, question mark is that ground may be quicker than ideal for him. Chance all the same. Betting: 10-1



BBC1



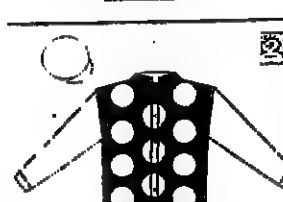
MUGONI BEACH
Jockey: Jamie Evans
Evans aims to become first Australian jockey to win National since William Wadkinson scored on Jack Horner in 1926. Likely to find himself beached on this Pipe-trained outsider who faces a severe test of his jumping. Betting: 65-1



NAHTHEN LAD
Jockey: Jason Tiley
Reunites 1995 Grand National-winning trainer and jockey team of Jenny Pitman and Tiley. Last season's high-class form approached only once in four runs this term. Chance on best efforts, but may be better on softer ground. Betting: 16-1



NEW CO
Jockey: David Casey
Dogged by jumping mistakes this season, although has still managed to win twice. Regular rider Conor O'Dwyer's decision to partner Antonin is hardly a vote of confidence. Casey makes his first National appearance. Betting: 40-1



NORTHERN HIDE
Jockey: Paul Holley
Taffy Salaman, who trained Churchtown Boy to finish second to Red Rum as long ago as 1977, returns to the National 17 years after his last attempt. However, holds only a slim chance of putting the record straight. Betting: 40-1



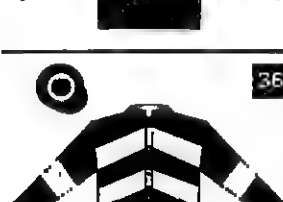
NUAFFE
Jockey: Terry Mitchell
Jumping errors, including a fall in the National two years ago, are all too easily found in his record. Only one win over the last two seasons and, with the ground riding faster than is ideal for him, has only modest prospects. Betting: 65-1



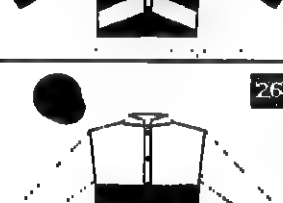
OVER THE STREAM
Jockey: Adie Smith
Thirteenth in last years National when trained by Kim Bailey and has since joined Kate Milligan. Another completion looks the limit of his ambitions but gives Smith, eight years a jockey, his first ride in the big race. Over and out. Betting: 100-1



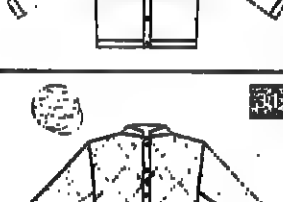
PINK GIN
Jockey: Chris Bonner
Shares, with Spuffington, the dubious distinction of being officially the worst horse in the race. Stays forever, and Bonner has a fine record over the big fences. But no reason to think his backers will be feeling in the pink. Betting: 100-1



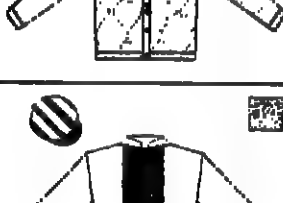
PLASTIC SPACEAGE
Jockey: Guy Upton
Oldest horse in the field. Could hardly be faced with a more demanding task, being asked to end a long losing run from an unfavourable position in the handicap. Betting: 100-1



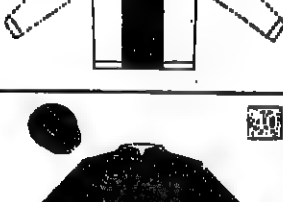
RIVER MANDATE
Jockey: Andrew Thornton
Demanding ride will have Thornton working hard long before the finish. Consistent in lesser company but must improve to win. Wears colours made famous by the magnificent Arkle and carried to National success by Last Suspect. Betting: 50-1



SCRIBBLER
Jockey: Dan Fort
Without a win since November 1994 and this is some place to try to end that sequence. Chance not helped by a fall last time in the Midland National at Uttoxeter. Not one to scribble on a betting slip today. Betting: 100-1



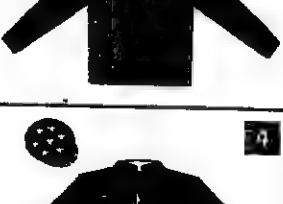
SMITH'S BAND
Jockey: Richard Dunwoody
Unites impeccable National records of Jenny Pitman and Dunwoody (two wins apiece). Progressed and should not be condemned on reappearance run. Chance, but confidence lessened by reservations about stamina. Betting: 20-1



SPUFFINGTON
Jockey: Philip Hide
Trainer Josh Gifford secured his place in National lore with the laity victory of Alderlin in 1981. Little hope of an encore today as, according to the official handicapper at least, there is no worse horse in the race. Betting: 100-1



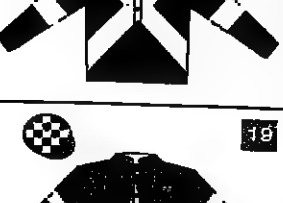
STRAIGHT TALK
Jockey: Joe Tizzard
Notable primarily for carrying the hopes of 17-year-old amateur rider Tizzard. Not particularly well handicapped and disclosed no less a jockey than the champion, Tony McCoy, over the National fences last time out. Betting: 50-1



SUNY BAY
Jockey: Jamie Osborne
Seeks £100,000 bonus for connections after winning Grand National Trial Chase at Haydock in February. Well handicapped, classy and, despite some reservations about the ground, has a fine chance. Betting: 8-1



TURNING TRIX
Jockey: John Kavanagh
Aimed at the National since winning at Newbury last month. His trainer, David Nicholson, is in sparkling form and this could turn out to be a case for Kavanagh CQ, quietly confident of a good performance. Betting: 40-1



VALIANT WARRIOR
Jockey: Russ Garrity
Consistent enough but does most of his racing at around 27 miles, so faces a bit of a shock with another two miles to cover here. Garrity has enjoyed a fine season but will need all his magic to bring this one home in front. Betting: 40-1



WYTHE HIDE
Jockey: Cwl Llewellyn
Best of the Irish. Not out of it when unseating rider six fences from home last year. Live hope, but ground perhaps faster than ideal. Betting: 9-1
VERDICT: 1, SUNY BAY; 2, Avro Anson; 3, General Wolfe; 4, Turning Trix

Keeping it step with Smith's Ban

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Keeping in step with Smith's Band

One good thing about travelling the country by car is that you have a rare opportunity to think. Normally it is three hours from my home to Aintree but, like so many others heading to Liverpool on Thursday, I got caught up in the motorway closures. There was serious gridlock and, needless to say, plenty of time to consider the big race.

It's probably as well I am not superstitious. I found myself wondering whether the chaos was indicative of what we could expect on Grand National day. No racing event has greater potential for chaos than 40 horses charging around Aintree.

There's little point in thinking too hard about how the race might unfold. I learnt that lesson as I approached the first fence on my first ride in 1985. I'd spent hours going through the runners, making a note of the bad jumpers and resolving not to follow any of them into a fence. Sure enough, as I headed for the first on West Tip, I found myself on the heels of Solihull Sport, a 100-1 no-hoper. He rushed ahead of me with his head in the air and he jumped right across my path. I was very fortunate not to end up on the floor - although I managed to achieve that, without outside assistance, at Becher's second time round.

Full form guide for the Grand National... 41

Obviously you have to be more aware than usual of the loose horses and what they might do. Otherwise, I try to ride the race the same as any other. It's a big occasion, the world is watching and riding in the National is always a huge thrill. But jockeys must keep their minds on the job. As at Cheltenham, it is too easy to lose concentration. It's about minimising the risks: not letting the distractions affect your performance.

It's funny how the Grand National produces anomalies among the statistics. Some fine jockeys have a terrible record but the race has been kind to me. I've been in the money seven times and the victories... of West Tip and Minnehoma are special memories. This time I ride Smith's Band for Jenny Pitman, whose horse, Superior Finish, I rode into third place last year. There is no finer trainer than Jenny when it comes to the National.

If you look at Smith's Band's form this season you couldn't really entertain him. Ideally, he would have had another run but Jenny is very happy with him. She knows what it takes and I am encouraged to hear her speak so well of the horse. Smith's Band stays and jumps well and had some solid form last season. I've never sat on him before - the ground has been too firm for me to school him in the build-up. However, I've seen plenty

RICHARD DUNWOODY



On minimising the risks at Aintree

of him and I'm anticipating a good experience.

My approach to riding the race is to come down the middle of the track. Jenny likes her horses to race down the inside, so that aspect needs to be suited in the paddock beforehand. Otherwise, I'll be anxious to let Smith's Band find his rhythm, which I believe is fundamental to his chance. It's a great feeling to ride a horse that responds to the unique challenge of Aintree and is comfortable with the pace of the race.

On the first circuit I won't be too concerned about my position. I'll be looking after Smith's Band as best I can. Only after jumping the water, in front of the stands, will I assess the situation. I'll be checking on the progress of the fancied horses and thinking about taking up a position. This is where the real race starts. The first circuit is strictly about survival.

I'll be keeping a close eye on Antonin and Wythe Hide, two horses I think have great chances. I was very impressed with Antonin at Punchestown last time. Wythe Hide ran well before unseating his jockey last year and he has always struck me as a National type. Of the others, Go Ballistic's fourth in the Gold Cup was his best run yet, but he has fallen three times in the last two seasons. Sunny Bay might just lead us all a merry dance. He stays well but the doubt about him is that he has broken blood vessels in the past. That could recur at any time.

Those with an eye for detail will notice I'm putting up 3lb overweight on Smith's Band at 10st 3lb. I did the same on Superior Finish last year - I don't want to go out there feeling too rough from a diet of wasting and saunas. Riding in the National is physically exhausting and all jockeys are thrilled just to complete the course. We tell each other we cannot ask for more than that, but we'll all be dreaming just the same.

Everyone who leaves the weighing room at around 3.30 this afternoon will be desperately hoping to return after an interview with Desmond Lynam.



O'Sullivan, in familiar commentary box pose with binoculars at the ready, covers his fiftieth and last Grand National today

O'Sullivan approaches final furlong of long and distinguished career

Richard Evans speaks to the man who has been "the voice of racing" for 50 years

The start half a century ago was hardly auspicious. After one of his earliest BBC commentaries, a decidedly unenthusiastic director of outside broadcasts insisted more practice was required. His mother was even more blunt. "Darling, I saw you on television yesterday and you looked absolutely ghastly. I do hope you are never going to do that again."

The maternal advice was ignored and this afternoon Peter O'Sullivan, 79, will climb the 76 steps to a commentary position high above Aintree racecourse for his 50th - and final - Grand National. For many, who choose the world's most famous steeplechase for their annual furlong, the race will never be quite the same again.

The unmistakable gravelly tones, the rat-a-tat delivery and the inevitable end of race crescendo have made "The Voice" as much a part of our national heritage as the race itself. And yet, ironically, the personal trademarks imitated by the likes of Mike Yarwood and Rory Bremner were the very reasons O'Sullivan came in for criticism when he first began speaking in the post-war years.

"My voice used to go up and I could not get the damn thing

down. It was probably the pressure and the excitement which raised it. Certainly, I was widely criticised for talking too quickly. I have letters from Peter Dimmock, who he became head of outside broadcasts saying I must talk slower."

No instant success: no great encouragement and, all those years ago, virtually no facilities to work from, which exposed O'Sullivan's fragile health to the worst of nature's elements. "This is one of the great mysteries: how I have survived physically for this long because it is not as though I set off with any great advantage in that respect. I had a very moderate chest, a tendency to bronchitis and flu, so it is amazing."

"I went regularly from Lincoln to Liverpool with the flu. Three days at the Carlisle and you cannot imagine how bleak and cold it was. The most Arctic day on the Rowley mile at Newmarket was like the Cote d'Azur by comparison. It was unbelievable: it would cut right through you. So it was a most unlikely career.

What compounds the improbability is the duration." Indeed, at the start of this decade, the idea of completing 50 Grand Nationals seemed the longest of long shots.

A few long-remembered outsiders have been called home - and tipped or backed - during his half century and for O'Sullivan, the Grand National is the race which touches the nerve of the nation. "It is without question the top. The Derby is exhilarating and exciting for different reasons, but the National is elevated to this emotional level by one's admiration for both horses and riders; the challenge that they face and for the sheer athletic achievement of the winning combination."

The victory of Merryman II in 1960 holds special memories. He suggested to Miss Winifred Wallace, owner of the hunter chaser, that Neville Crump would be the ideal trainer. O'Sullivan had an ante-post tickle months before the race - £1,000-£28 to win and £50-£10 to complete the first circuit - and then called him home in what was the first televised National.

"The equipment we had was diabolical. The monitor was dreadful and there were all the ingredients for disaster. The producer was screaming and there were plenty of panic stations. At the end I felt rung out like a rag but apparently the broadcast had gone well and Merryman won. Everything had come right."

The National without O'Sullivan will seem like Morecambe without Wise, strawberries without cream. And yet it could have been all very different. If he could have foreseen the "appalling" way the BBC stopped covering the Derby and lost other prestige meetings, he might have taken a generous financial offer to join ITV years ago. Even now, he sympathises with recent criticism of the BBC's rather staid style of presenting day-to-day racing.

Today he has more important matters. The Princess Royal will unveil a bust of O'Sullivan after the first race before joining him in the commentary box. And then there is his last National call. "I am not very relaxed until the race has started but once it is underway I feel I am with them..." This afternoon hundreds of millions of viewers around the globe will be with him.

Lo Stregone has history on his side in National challenge

By JACK WATERMAN

IN JUST over the past two decades a sea-change has taken place in the character of the Martell Grand National. The fences, of course, have been modified but still need jumping, as was strikingly proved in the John Hughes Trophy Chase this Thursday when only nine of the 20 starters completed the course. Of more significance, however, is a remarkable shift in the most common age of winners.

Traditionally, this used to be nine: from 1946 up to 1974, 14 of this age group succeeded, plus eight eight-year olds and only six older horses. But from 1975 onwards, the break-down has become: five 12-year olds, six 11-year olds and four ten-year olds, with only four aged nine, and two aged eight.

Handicap

In the same period from 1975, only two winners have run off the minimum weight of ten stone. The other 19 were all in the handicap proper. Today, there are only nine in that category, and, because the participation of Master Oats has given such a lopsided look to the weights, consideration can be extended to fancied runners such as Lord Gyllene, Wythe Hide and Antonin, who are only a pound out of the handicap.

Stamina

Those with ability to see out the extreme distance include Lo Stregone, Lord Gyllene and Sunny Bay.

Betting

Outright favourites have a poor record: only two have succeeded in the past 10 runnings, including Rough Quest, who led the betting market at 7-1 last year. Yet other well-backed horses frequently succeed. Favourites apart, in the past quarter-century, 14 winners have been priced between 13-2 and 16-1.

Trained in Ireland

Five horses take part on the 150th anniversary of their first triumph, with Matthew in 1847, L'Escartot in 1975 was the most recent success, however. Notably Wythe Hide and Antonin will be going for a change of luck this afternoon.

Jockeys

Richard Dunwoody has the best record with two victories, and four other times in the first four. Other winning riders are Jason Titley, Mick Fitzgerald and Carl Llewellyn.

Trainers

Jenny Pitman richly deserves her title of "Queen of Aintree": two winners and four lesser places. Kim Bailey, Gordon Richards, Tim Forster and Martin Pipe are others with past victories.

Verdict

LO STREGONE is given the vote over Lord Gyllene, Antonin and Nabhren Lad.

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4 1/2 miles, Aintree 3.45pm, Live on BBC TV

10/1 Avro Anson	40/1 Valiant Warrior
10/1 Go Ballistic	50/1 Bishops Hall
10/1 Lord Gyllene	50/1 Glenmot
10/1 Sunny Bay	50/1 Northern Hide
10/1 Wythe Hide	66/1 Back Bar
10/1 Lo Stregone	66/1 Full Of Oats
10/1 Smith's Band	66/1 Grange Brake
10/1 General Wolfe	66/1 Mugoni Beach
10/1 Antonin	66/1 Straight Talk
10/1 Nabhren Lad	100/1 Camelot Knight
10/1 Belmont King	100/1 Celtic Knight
10/1 Buckboard Bounce	100/1 Dakyns Boy
10/1 Feathered Gale	100/1 Nuafie
10/1 Killashin	100/1 Scribble
10/1 Master Oats	100/1 Pink Gin
10/1 Dextera Dove	100/1 Plastic Spaceage
10/1 Turning Trick	100/1 Spuffington
10/1 Evangelica	100/1 Over The Stream
10/1 New Co	100/1 Don't Light Up
10/1 River Mandate	100/1 Master Boston

B/R = Trainer's stable name

Each way One Quarter the odds a place 1, 2, 3, 4. Places subject to handicap available up to First Show. Generally Risk 4/1 may apply. Non-Runners - Not Set

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YESTERDAY'S RESULTS

Aintree

Going: good

8.00 (1m 4f) 1. SAN MARTINO (R)

2.10 (1m 4f) 1.14 Miss G. Hildrew, Top

10-11, 12-13, 14-15, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21, 22-23, 24-25, 26-27, 28-29, 30-31, 32-33, 34-35, 36-37, 38-39, 40-41, 42-43, 44-45, 46-47, 48-49, 50-51, 52-53, 54-55, 56-57, 58-59, 60-61, 62-63, 64-65, 66-67, 68-69, 70-71, 72-73, 74-75, 76-77, 78-79, 80-81, 82-83, 84-85, 86-87, 88-89, 90-91, 92-93, 94-95, 96-97, 98-99, 100-101, 102-103, 104-105, 106-107, 108-109, 110-111, 112-113, 114-115, 116-117, 118-119, 120-121, 122-123, 124-125, 126-127, 128-129, 130-131, 132-133, 134-135, 136-137, 138-139, 140-141, 142-143, 144-145, 146-147, 148-149, 150-151, 152-153, 154-155, 156-157, 158-159, 160-161, 162-163, 164-165, 166-167, 168-169, 170-171, 172-173, 174-175, 176-177, 178-179, 180-181, 182-183, 184-185, 186-187, 188-189, 190-191, 192-193, 194-195, 196-197, 198-199, 200-201, 202-203, 204-205, 206-207, 208-209, 210-211, 212-213, 214-215, 216-217, 218-219, 220-221, 222-223, 224-225, 226-227, 228-229, 230-231, 232-233, 234-235, 236-237, 238-239, 240-241, 242-243, 244-245, 246-247, 248-249, 250-251, 252-253, 254-255, 256-257, 258-259, 260-261, 262-263, 264-265, 266-267, 268-269, 270-271, 272-273, 274-275, 276-277, 278-279, 280-281, 282-283, 284-285, 286-287, 288-289, 290-291, 292-293, 294-295, 296-297, 298-299, 300-301, 302-303, 304-305, 306-307, 308-309, 310-311, 312-313, 314-315, 316-317, 318-319, 320-321, 322-323, 324-325, 326-327, 328-329, 330-331, 332-333, 334-335, 336-337, 338-339, 340-341, 342-343, 344-345, 346-347, 348-349, 350-351, 352-353, 354-355, 356-357, 358-359, 360-361, 362-363, 364-365, 366-367, 368-369, 370-371, 372-373, 374-375, 376-377, 378-379, 380-381, 382-383, 384-385, 386-387, 388-389, 390-391, 392-393, 394-395, 396-397, 398-399, 400-401, 402-403, 404-405, 406-407, 408-409, 410-411, 412-413, 414-415, 416-417, 418-419, 420-421, 422-423, 424-425, 426-427, 428-429, 430-431, 432-433, 434-435, 436-437, 438-439, 440-441, 442-443, 444-445, 446-447, 448-449, 450-451, 452-453, 454-455, 456-457, 458-459, 460-461, 462-463, 464-465, 466-467, 468-469, 470-471, 472-473, 474-475, 476-477, 478-479, 480-481, 482-483, 484-485, 486-487, 488-489, 490-491, 492-493, 494-495, 496-497, 498-499, 500-501, 502-503, 504-505, 506-507, 508-509, 510-511, 512-513, 514-515, 516-517, 518-519, 520-521, 522-523, 524-525, 526-527, 528-529, 530-531, 532-533, 534-535, 536-537, 538-539, 540-541, 542-543, 544-545, 546-547, 548-549, 550-551, 552-553, 554-555, 556-557, 558-559, 560-561, 562-563, 564-565, 566-567, 568-569, 570-571, 572-573, 574-575, 576-577, 578-579, 580-581, 582-583, 584-585, 586-587, 588-589, 590-591, 592-593, 594-595, 596-597, 598-599, 600-601, 602-603, 604-605, 606-607, 608-609, 610-611, 612-613, 614-615, 616-617, 618-619, 620-621, 622-623, 624-625, 626-627, 628-629, 630-631, 632-633, 634-635, 636-637, 638-639, 640-641, 642-643, 644-645, 646-647, 648-649, 650-651, 652-653, 654-655, 656-657, 658-659, 660-661, 662-663, 664-665, 666-667, 668-669, 670-671, 672-673, 674-675, 676-677, 678-679, 680-681, 682-683, 684-685, 686-687, 688-689, 690-691, 692-693, 694-695, 696-697, 698-699, 700-701, 702-703, 704-705, 706-707, 708-709, 710-711, 712-713, 714-715, 716-717, 718-719, 720-721, 722-723, 724-725, 726-727, 728-729, 730-731, 732-733, 734-735, 736-737, 738-739, 740-741, 742-743, 744-745, 746-747, 748-749, 750-751, 752-753, 754-755, 756-757, 758-759, 760-761, 762-763, 764-765, 766-767, 768-769, 770-771, 772-773, 774-775, 776-777, 778-779, 780-781, 782-783, 784-785, 786-787, 788-789, 790-791, 792-793, 794-795, 796-797, 798-799, 800-801, 802-803, 804-805, 806-807, 808-809, 810-811, 812-813, 814-815, 816-817, 818-819, 820-821, 822-823, 824-825, 826-827, 828-829, 830-831, 832-833, 834-835, 836-837, 838-839, 840-841, 842-843, 844-845, 846-847, 848-849, 850-851, 852-853, 854-855, 856-857, 858-859, 860-861, 862-863, 864-865, 866-867, 868-869, 870-871, 872-873, 874-875, 876-877, 878-879, 880-881, 882-883, 884-885, 886-887, 888-889, 890-891, 892-893, 894-895, 896-897, 898-899, 900-901, 902-903, 904-905, 906-907, 908-909, 910-911, 912-913, 914-915, 916-917, 918-919, 920-921, 922-923, 924-925, 926-927, 928-929, 930-931, 932-933, 934-935, 936-937, 938-939, 940-941, 942-943, 944-945, 946-947, 948-949, 950-951, 952-953, 954-955, 956-957, 958-959, 960-961, 962-963, 964-965, 966-967, 968-969, 970-971, 972-973, 974-975, 976-977, 978-979, 980-981, 982-983, 984-985, 986-987, 988-989, 990-991, 992-993, 994-995, 996-997, 998-999, 1000-1001, 1002-1003, 1004-1005, 1006-1007, 1008-1009, 1010-1011, 1012-1013, 1014-1015, 1016-1017, 1018-1019, 1020-1021, 1022-1023, 1024-1025, 1026-1027, 1028-1029, 1030-1031, 1032-1033, 1034-1035, 1036-1037, 1038-1039, 1040-1041, 1042-10

TENNIS: BRITISH HOPES REJUVENATED AS DAVIS CUP NOVICE PROVES TOO TALL AN ORDER FOR BLACK

Richardson rises to the challenge

BY ALIX RAMSAY

FROM the very depths of gloom and despondency, Andrew Richardson emerged as the British Davis Cup team's unlikely hero yesterday.

With Zimbabwe 1-0 up in their Euro-African zone group one tie, thanks to Jamie Delgado's spectacular collapse in the opening match, Richardson fought through his first five-set encounter to beat Byron Black 3-6, 6-4, 1-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Chosen as Britain's No 2 player, he was expected to be little more than cannon fodder against Zimbabwe's leading player, who is the only man ranked in the top 50 to be appearing at Crystal Palace this weekend. The only hint of hope had been Black's wary approach to playing tall left-handers. When he came to London he assumed he would be playing — and worrying about — Greg Rusedski. Instead, while Rusedski nursed a wrist injury that may keep him out of Wimbledon



Richardson shows the poise, power and determination that took him to an unexpected victory for Britain at Crystal Palace yesterday

this year, he found himself up against 6ft 7in Richardson. The outcome was much the same.

Richardson started nervously, losing his service in the opening game and never able to get back on level terms. It seemed to be the beginning of a fairly rapid end for Britain, especially after Richardson lost an early advantage in the second set. Eventually, though, he got his booming service going. In total, he thumped down 22 aces, keeping Black on the back foot and, by the end of the fourth set, it was Black who was looking flustered.

Richardson's reach, height and strength were beginning to pay dividends. Going for almost every shot and showing little fear, he nailed Black

with backhands down the line and across the court. He tried his luck at the net, but when he was forced into long rallies from the back of the court he traded shots with growing confidence. With neither man able to gain the advantage in the fourth set until the very end, it was Black, the world No 46, who crumbled, sacrificing his service and the set with a double fault.

Entering new territory in the fifth set, Richardson had the crowd — a full house at 2,300 — cheering as he broke for a 4-2 lead. He lost his own

service straightaway but there was a feeling in the air that he was the man of the moment. He went all out for the Black service, pumping two winning forehands down the line. As the second left Black stranded, the tall but self-effacing Briton looked as if he could not quite believe what he had done.

David Lloyd, the British captain, who had had a resigned look about him as the match began, knew exactly what Richardson had achieved. He had never seen a Davis Cup debut like it. "To come back like that after

starting off nervously was fantastic," he said. "From there he went from strength to strength. It was a terrific performance."

Delgado had only flattered to deceive at the beginning of the first rubber, against Wayne Black, Byron's younger brother. Storming away with the first set, he found himself playing an opponent petrified with stage fright. That gave the 20-year-old British No 5 a chance to show what he could do.

Taking Black's service apart with his backhand returns,

keeping him confined to defensive duties on the baseline with a range of shots that belied his world ranking of No 260. When it came to the crunch, however, a set ahead and serving to level the scores at 4-4, he made a crucial error. Jumping to put away a smash on game point, he took his eye off the ball and dumped it into the net. Two points later he was 5-3 down and drowning.

The errors had already started to creep into his game by then, and once Black had taken the second set, they

came thick and fast. In all he served 13 double faults, three of them on break points, as he collapsed quickly and quietly to lose 2-6, 6-3, 6-1, 6-3. It was rather as Black had expected, in the light of his opponent's racing start. "Jamie was just too good for me in the first set and I kind of expected a let down, but maybe not quite such a let down," he said. "He started missing his first serves and that gave me more chances."

Luckily for Lloyd, Richardson was on hand to revive Britain's hopes.

RUGBY LEAGUE

Injuries threaten early surge by raging Bulls

BY CHRISTOPHER IRVINE

WITH two forwards in plaster and another suspended, Bradford Bulls are in a position where they cannot afford any more injuries or indiscipline to undermine their position at the top of the Super League.

Warren Jowitt, who broke his ankle in the victory at Castleford on Tuesday, and Jeremy Donougher, injured earlier in the season, will definitely miss the Silk Cut Challenge Cup final against St Helens on May 3. Unless Brian McDermott's appeal against a four-match ban for striking three opponents in the semi-final defeat of Leeds Rhinos is successful, he will only be available for one league match before Wembley.

In the fall-out from that notorious semi-final, Matthew Elliott, the Bradford coach, has escaped a possible disrepute charge for his post-match criticisms of the referee, but his injury problems are mounting. "Our depth is being tested and we certainly can't afford any more injuries," he said.

The London Broncos side that Bradford overcame with ease on the road to Wembley will be a different proposition at Odsal tomorrow night. They are unbeaten in three outings and are tucked behind Bradford, who have played one match fewer, in a clutch of six teams on six points.

Shaun Edwards must settle for a third appearance on the bench, with Josh White in a rich vein of form at scrum half. Tony Currie, the London coach, has named an unchanged starting team, but the addition to the squad of Matthew Salter, the Great Britain Academy prop, has further strengthened the English contingent in the Broncos' mainly Australian line-up.

Not surprisingly, Warrington Wolves stick with the side that defeated Wigan Warriors

on Monday for the visit of Oldham Bears, which will be Darryl Van De Velde's first game in charge at Wilderspool. Oldham are without a Super League win, but the side have been reassured by Andy Goodway that he will be staying as coach until the end of the season.

Goodway had hinted at resignation, joining the recent trend that has seen four of the 12 Super League clubs part company with their coaches after only three weeks of the campaign. Goodway was mentioned in relation to the job at Castleford, before John Joyner's departure on Thursday, but that vacancy is being advertised and Mick Morgan has taken temporary charge.

Bobbie Goulding returns to the St Helens team tonight after serving a six-match ban for a high tackle. Goulding will resume his half-back partnership with Tommy Martyn, who is returning from injury, for the St Helens Super League match away to Paris Saint-Germain.

for the visit tomorrow to Sheffield Eagles.

Castleford, who are without the injured trio of Dean Sampson, Grant Anderson and Nathan Sykes, move Andrew Schick from the bench to the second row and Richard Russell replaces Lee St Hillaire at hooker. Sheffield have shuffled their back division after the defeat at St Helens on Monday. Whetu Teawea is moved from the wing into the centre and Keith Senior and Nick Pinckney are partnered on the left side.

John Pendlebury is undefeated in three matches in charge of Halifax Blue Sox, who entertain a Salford Reds side whose unbeaten league record will be severely tested.

Glory in absurd pillar of Wisden

THE latest edition of *Wisden* emerges, and the Editor's words hammer mercilessly at various muddled, confused, incompetent and bloody-minded persons of English cricket, while celebrating the glories of the game — many of which lie in its absurdities.

The new annual treasure trove, the Index of Unusual Occurrences, includes: batsman reaches Test century during tea interval; bogus batsman faces ball; England match abandoned through boredom; Munjac fawn in members' enclosures and player takes tea in middle.

A story that appeared in this column, about the fielder who returned the ball by bus, has the honour of appearing in the Editor's Notes. The winner of this column's competition will be announced next week.

The latest *Wisden* shows a highly successful season for Sussex. Ranjitsinhji topped the averages with 76.33, from C. B. Fry. The editor was moaning on about the state of pitches in England: "The climax was reached during the past season at Leyton, the wicket on that ground being so superlatively good that it was almost impossible in fine weather to play a game out."

Four-day cricket? It could never happen here. This is a reprint from the 1902 edition, which is obtainable from The Willows Publishing Company, 17 The Willows, Stone, Staffordshire.

Let us play

"If you all hate St Sulpius clap your hands..." A kind of World Cup for training Roman Catholic priests is to be held this week. Seminars from Tournai, Namur and Liège, in Belgium, St Sulpius, in Paris, Womersley, in Surrey, Allen Hall, in Chelsea, and Ushaw, in Durham, and Mashwood, in Ireland, will play in a football tournament that ends with a final on Wednesday at Oscott College, in Sutton Coldfield. The cup will be presented by the Archbishop of Birmingham.

Weah's way

George Weah, the Liberian winner of the world footballer of the year award, has long been a hero of this column, and he continues to build on that heroic status.

SIMON BARNES



On Saturday

Liberia are due to play a World Cup qualifying match against Egypt on Sunday (though, Welsh club, AC Milan, are still trying to change the fixture so that their main man can play for them). Naturally, the match cannot be held in Liberia, because of the troubles there.

It will be held in Ghana. The costs of the trip, around £20,000, will be born by Weah himself. This has happened several times before — the Government always promises to repay him, and never does. Weah also bankrolls a Liberian team called Junior Professionals.

□ *toboggan run*, from swerve of snow to bend of ice, bring us by commodious vicus of recirculation back to Japan and the Olympic Games. Yes, if I may be pardoned a jocundous reference, Ireland is to receive assistance from the International Olympic Committee Solidarity Fund in order to prepare a toboggan team for the winter Olympics, which take place in Nagano next winter.

Legal brief

Memo to Middlesbrough FC, which is considering legal action in an attempt to get its three points back: points that were deducted for the failure to put out a team against Blackburn Rovers: Augusto Ledo, the president of the Spanish club Deportivo La Coruña, took FIFA to court to protest against his own 18-month suspension from the game. But the world governing body's stand is that it is illegal to take legal action against them. For his temerity, FIFA fined Ledo 100,000 Swiss francs.

SNOOKER: DAVIS OR HENDRY AWAITS AS WELSHMAN QUELLS EBDON'S STUBBORN RESISTANCE

Williams holds his nerve to reach final

BY PHIL YATES

MARK WILLIAMS overcame a considerable attack of nerves under intense pressure to beat Peter Ebdon 6-5 in a dramatic conclusion to their semi-final at the British Open, in Plymouth, yesterday. He now meets Stephen Hendry or Steve Davis for the £60,000 first prize.

Williams, winner of the Regal Welsh Open and Grand Prix titles last year, had required only 71 and 61 minutes respectively to beat Nick Pearce and Tony Drago in two of the earlier rounds but, as expected, Ebdon displayed a stubborn streak after a low-key start.

Breaks of 49 and 87 helped Ebdon to

enter the mid-session interval on level terms at 2-2 but Williams, renowned for his ability to seize any match by the throat, reeled off the next three frames in quick succession to lead 5-2.

Williams, uninhibited in his shot selection and clearly determined to play to his strengths, pulled off a series of raking pots from distance that led to breaks of 70, 34, 47, 39 and 30. However, Ebdon's reputation as a tenacious battler is well chronicled and known to Williams from personal experience.

Ebdon beat him 5-4 in the last 16 of the International Open two months ago after he had been 3-1 in arrears.

After failing to bother the scorers in the eighth frame, Williams then

missed a red across the top cushion when 22-0 up in the ninth. Ebdon fearlessly doubled a red to a middle pocket and went on to construct a break of 80 to reduce his deficit to only 5-4.

By now, Williams was feeling Ebdon's breath on the back of his neck and the pressure mounted for the Welshman when his surrender of the tenth frame ensured that the contest would run to the wire.

Williams, leading 23-4 in the decider, wasted a good opportunity when his shirt cuff grazed a red but, when Ebdon left the blue over a baulk pocket with a misjudged safety, Williams dispatched it to leave his rival needing a snooker that he proved unable to lay.

"I should have won a lot earlier, so, because of that, and what was at stake, I was really under the cosh on those last few colours," Williams said. "I am well aware that Peter never waves the white flag and, as he fought back, he looked stronger and stronger."

The prospect of playing Davis or Hendry — with 12 world titles, 135 tournament wins and more than £10 million in total career prize-money between them — clearly does not appeal to Williams. Asked which of them he would prefer to tackle, the Welshman quipped: "Neither. I wish it was Willie Thorne instead."

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EQUESTRIANISM

Hickstead season in jeopardy

HICKSTEAD may be closed for the 1997 season because of a financial crisis at the "Wimbledon of showjumping" (John Goodbody writes). Already the Nations Cup has been moved to the Royal Windsor Horse Show.

Yesterday, Douglas Bunn, the master of Hickstead, warned of closure if money is not found to support the Royal International Horse Show (July 10-13) and the British Jumping Derby meeting (August 14-17).

David Broome, who won the Nations Cup six times and who is now chairman of the British Show Jumping Association (BSJA), described the threat to Hickstead, founded in 1960, as "a great shame, and that is an understatement". Silk Cut, former sponsor of the Nations Cup, has transferred resources into Formula One motor racing. Andrew Findling, the BSJA secretary general, said yesterday that the big sports, such as football and motor racing, were "sucking in a high percentage of sponsorships. It is not a problem unique to the United Kingdom".

However, it is understood that the Royal Windsor Horse Show, from May 14-18, has obtained sponsorship worth £600,000, including backing from Samsung for the Nations Cup. Simon Brooks-Ward, the show director, said: "Although we have to admit that showjumping has seen better days, with a bit of initiative and decisive action, the sport will rise again."

CRICKET: IRELAND HAVE TO PLAY FAVOURITES IN ICC TROPHY SEMI-FINAL

World Cup door ajar for Scotland

FROM A CORRESPONDENT IN KUALA LUMPUR

IRELAND and Scotland reached the semi-final stage of the ICC Trophy for the first time yesterday to guarantee local opposition for England in the 1997 World Cup. With three of the last four assured of an invitation, Ireland and Scotland will be forced to play-off for a place should they lose difficult matches to Kenya and Bangladesh over the next four days.

Ireland have the unenviable task of tackling Kenya tomorrow in the first semi-final. Kenya have proved a class above and, in Martin Suji, they have the best bowler in the tournament. He took three for 18 from his ten overs against Scotland in the final round of quarter-final group matches to earn the Kenyans a victory on run-rate. Scotland had bowled out the favourites for 153 and, with Suji's quota of overs completed, they might well

have gone close to a surprise win from a sturdy base of 37 for three men 23 overs had the rain not arrived.

Ireland have a net session booked for this morning after yesterday's rain. They are facing a revised target of 141 from 33 overs. Akram Khan was equal to the task, though, hitting 67 not out to get Bangladesh home with three wickets and eight balls in hand.

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HOCKEY: WEEKEND OF DECISIVE ENCOUNTERS IN MEN'S AND WOMEN'S LEAGUES

Teddington waiting for Reading to slip

BY SYDNEY FRISKIN

AFTER finishing runners-up in the European Cup Winners' Cup last Monday, Reading's next objective is the National League premier division title, which will be theirs if they defeat Cannock at home tomorrow. If Reading lose or draw, Teddington, only a point behind, will win the trophy if they beat Canterbury at Chiswick.

Except for Hughes-Rowlands, who is injured, Cannock will take a full-strength side to Reading. If the home side can maintain their momentum, with Pearn and Ashdown setting the pace up front, they will be hard to beat. Teddington will miss Tyrone Moore, their reliable defender, who is not available, but are still expecting a win.

Barford Tigers and Surbiton will be fighting for survival at the other end of the table. Surbiton, who entertain Hounslow, know that a win will keep them up. If Surbiton lose or draw, they will leave the escape hatch open for Barford, who would need to beat East Grinstead to survive.

Beeston and Doncaster have already earned promotion to the premier division. Croxted and Trojans will be relegated to their respective regional leagues, but three other clubs — Oxford University, Edgbaston and City of Portsmouth — are not yet safe and two of them will end up in the inter-league play-offs at Milton Keynes later this month.

JANE SMITH, the Slough and England striker, will be hoping to celebrate more than her 28th birthday today when she plays against her former club, Ipswich, in the first of two contests between the teams this weekend that could set either on the way to league and cup glory.

With two games remaining in the premiership, Ipswich, one point clear at the head of the table, know that victory over their nearest challengers will be enough to secure the championship. Slough, naturally, have other ideas. The indoor champions are still in with a chance of lifting all three domestic trophies.

"I'll have mixed feelings when we get on the pitch because I had two good sea-

sons at Ipswich," Smith said. "It's weird being clubmates one year and rivals the next. I had to leave because I couldn't keep commuting from London and they understood that."

Smith, capped 57 times by England, believes that the result today will have a strong influence on the outcome of the sixth-round AEWHA Cup tie tomorrow.

"The side with the strongest mental approach will triumph," she said. "Both squads are pretty evenly matched when it comes to skill."

"It will come down to which club wants it the most. We certainly won't be celebrating if we win the league match, because we're treating both games equally seriously."

SQUASH

Nicol takes off after four years of failure

BY COLIN MCQUILLAN

PETER NICOL, having ended the first-round jinx that has blighted his progress in the British Open championship for the past four years, yesterday became the first Scotsman to reach the semi-finals of the competition since 1963, when Michael Oddy went on to lose to Abou Taleb, of Egypt, in the final.

Nicol, moving smoothly but with electric sharpness, overcame Brett Martin, of Australia, 15-10, 15-11, 13-15, 15-12 in the Leekes-sponsored event in Cardiff.

An uncharacteristic change-down in gear by his 34-year-old opponent halfway through the second game took Nicol by surprise and probably cost him the third game.

"It was a bit unnerving to find Brett slow-balling in a British Open quarter-final," Nicol said. "Then when I got to match ball, at 14-10 in the fourth, Brett suddenly went into overdrive and I had to adjust to a blitz of shots."

More specifically, Nicol had to survive a backhand cross-court flick into the right nick from Martin, then a whiplash backhand drive to the deep right corner and a blindingly complicated rally that eventually left him stranded inside his opponent's racket swing and minus a penalty point.

Had Martin's next crashing forehand not clipped the top of the tin, Oddy's record might have lasted at least a game longer. "Brett was tired by that time, but when he is tired he is so lethal," Nicol said.

His semi-final opponent will be Rodney Eyles, the No 2 seed from Australia, who fought back from 1-2 down against Jonathan Power, of Canada, to win 15-13, 5-15, 9-15, 15-12 in 95 minutes.

In the women's event, Sue Wright, of Kent, the British national champion, defeated Linda Charman, of Sussex, 9-7, 9-5, 9-4 to reach a semi-final against Sarah Fitz-Gerald, the No 1 seed and world champion, from Australia.

In the bottom half of the draw, Fiona Geaves, of Gloucester, was due to meet Jane Martin, of Northumbria, with a semi-final against Michelle Martin, the No 2 seed from Australia, awaiting the winner.

Callard omit
Bath attempt
climb from 11

Wales
with elite

FOOTBALL

Leicester prepare Wembley ambush

By PETER BALL

AS Leicester City discovered in 1969, it is not unknown for a team to reach a cup final and be relegated in the same year, but Middlesbrough, Leicester's opponents at Wembley tomorrow in the Coca-Cola Cup final, could yet make such bitter-sweet achievements pale by comparison.

They play an FA Cup semi-final a week later, leaving open the possibility that, after failing to reach a significant final in 122 years, they could end the season with two cups in their trophy cabinet. They are also in some danger, albeit receding, of relegation. A schizophrenic season, by any criteria.

It is hard to imagine a greater contrast than with Martin O'Neill's wholly admiral

think I can be accused of putting a side together too quickly," Bryan Robson, the manager, said.

With the return to the basics of a back four, the signing of Nesta and Schwarzer, and the reappearance of Nigel Pearson, they are a more compact, unified team, and the cup successes have begun to be carried over into the FA Cup.

Tomorrow the attention will focus on Juninho and Ravanelli, who could provide one of the more memorable final but, even on the big day, with Juninho only just back from Brazil and Ravanelli still enigmatic about his future, the doubts cannot be put aside.

With Internazionale hovering, Middlesbrough may need to win a trophy — and avoid relegation — to retain Ravanelli. "It is so important to play in Europe," he said. "When you are used to it, you miss it. But we must not only think about Europe. It would be very bad to get into Europe [by winning the Coca-Cola Cup] and be relegated at the same time."

Ravanelli stayed out of Italy's draw with Poland on Wednesday to protect a hamstring and ensure his fitness for tomorrow.

As important as the Italian will be tomorrow, the presence of Pearson will be vital if the team of Heskey and Claridge is to be contained. Four years ago, as Sheffield Wednesday captain, a broken leg cost Pearson four Wembley appearances — a semi-final, two finals and a replay — in two months.

His indomitable spirit will need to be reflected by his team, for Leicester demonstrated outstanding resilience and team spirit in their semi-final battle with Wimbledon (and, indeed, in their FA Cup matches with Chelsea). They might not have a Juninho but, in Parker and Lennon, they have a midfield to respect.

They also have Wembley experience. If their four FA Cup finals, all unsuccessful, are shrouded in the mists of time, most of their present team have played in four recent play-off finals. Last year Claridge's goal in the dying seconds capped an outstanding team performance, combining irresistible determination with some excellent passing. Middlesbrough beware.

On some occasions Middlesbrough have looked a bit of a mess, with a defence that is one of the worst at the top level in living memory, and in front of them a bickering, unco-ordinated crew. "We have had our teething troubles, but if we win two cups and stay up this season, I don't

Poacher and goalkeeper relish Coca-Cola Cup final confrontation

Australian rules the Middlesbrough roost

By DAVID MADDOCK

STANDING outside the Riverside Stadium on a biting North East evening, two skinny boys huddle together, nervously waiting for a glimpse of Middlesbrough's latest foreign import. Striding into the night comes their quarry, and all uncertainty is dispersed.

Blond and, at 6ft 4in, imposing, it is easy to recognise Mark Schwarzer, even when the only previous glimpse of him has been from the back of a stand through Teesside drizzle. Then, when he talks, his blinkered confidence makes it even clearer that here is a member of that strange breed: the last line of defence.

"I am not mad, or at least I don't think of myself as being part of that mad fraternity of goalkeepers, but I am outspoken. I have got my opinions and I give them," he said through a smile. "You have to possess that confidence and be a little eccentric to be a goalkeeper. Maybe I am mad, but when I see players doing that tackling business... that's absolutely crazy."

Another laugh and Schwarzer delivers the most telling evidence of all. "Anyway, I am an Aussie and you know Aussies — I bet you've never met a shy one."

Schwarzer was born in Sydney 24 years ago to German parents who had emigrated in search of a better life. His father ran the local children's football club and put him in goal "because he reckoned I kept tripping over my own feet as an outfield player". From such beginnings, Schwarzer has become the most unlikely, yet

most significant, of Bryan Robson's exotic signings.

The Middlesbrough manager's outlay on foreigners is fast approaching £30 million, yet it was only after a relatively modest £1.25 million investment in Schwarzer at the end of February that it really began to pay dividends.

Before Schwarzer's arrival, Middlesbrough had won five FA Cup Premiership games all season. In March, with his assured presence generating calm, they record-

ed four straight league victories to suggest an escape from what had appeared the certainty of relegation.

Schwarzer also produced fine performances against Stockport County in the Coca-Cola Cup semi-final to help his club to the first important final in its 121-year history.

Tomorrow, at Wembley, he will add another twist to a bizarre season that started with him sitting in the stands in Germany and included an unsuccessful trial with Manchester City. "I can't quite believe what has happened," Schwarzer said. "I have felt down at times, but I never lost my confidence and now I am playing at Wembley. Mind you, for all the glamour, our

main goal has still got to be survival."

Possessing a strong belief in his own ability as well as dual nationality, Schwarzer had travelled to Germany as a fresh-faced 21-year-old in search of his fortune. Instead, he endured 2½ years "of being messed about" by Kaiserslautern before walking out. "I am not being arrogant, but I knew I was worth a place in the side," he said.

Retreating to the Australia squad, Schwarzer talked to countrymen playing in England and three days later was on his way to Mainz Road for a trial. Neither Manchester City nor he were impressed, but his trial match was against Bradford City and for three months he proved his brilliance with them in the first division, as well as two high-profile FA Cup ties, against Everton and Sheffield Wednesday. Robson came calling, offering Bradford a £1 million profit on their investment after just two games, and tomorrow the fairy-tale will almost be complete.

Schwarzer, though, hopes that there will be no more frustrations. "Kaiserslautern won the cup in Germany, but were relegated by a goal with just eight minutes of this season remaining, and I don't want a repeat of that," he said. "It has always been my ambition to play in the Premiership and even though the cups are a nice diversion, it is vital that we don't let them deflect us from the real aim." Nothing, one suspects, will deflect Schwarzer from his goals, figuratively and literally.



The imposing Schwarzer has helped to transform Middlesbrough's season

First-class Claridge back on track

Richard Hobson meets a Leicester City forward enjoying the best form of his life at Filbert Street

Nothing tests the imagination like a photo-opportunity. It is an occasion for posing in contrived situations that become less and less relevant to the event they are intended to promote. This week, Filbert Street staged a classic of its type.

Three of the Leicester City players were called upon to publicise the Coca-Cola Cup final, against Middlesbrough, tomorrow. Emile Heskey, nicknamed "Bruno", put on a pair of boxing gloves. Kasey Keller, a United States international, was handed a baseball bat. But what to do with the third man?

"Perhaps you could put me on a horse and lead me to the bookies," Steve Claridge said with a chuckle.

It takes a special kind of person to be able to laugh at his own misfortune, but then Claridge has needed a sense of humour down the years. In his cathartic autobiography, *Tales From The Boot Camps*, he estimates his gambling losses at more than £300,000 since he placed his first bet, at the age of 11. There are parts of the book that might have been penned by Thomas

Hardy, such is the extent of the ill fortune that befalls him.

An adopted child, he was diagnosed as having a heart condition at 12 (he still takes medication) and released by Portsmouth at 17. Alan Ball, then in charge at Fratton Park, paid out the remainder of Claridge's contract. The £500 was gambled away that same afternoon. Since then, Claridge has played in every division of the Football League, as well as for Basingstoke, Fareham Town and Weymouth.

His addiction was exposed in a newspaper last year shortly before Leicester's first division play-off final against Crystal Palace. Claridge scored the winning goal in extra-time. "Once it had come out in the papers, I had no reservations

about going through with the book," Claridge said. "I have nothing in my life to brag about but, if people ask questions, I have to be honest."

Claridge, 31 on Thursday, has been determined to seize his belated opportunity in the top flight this season and has emerged as one of the most important members of a side that has held its own.

He said: "I knew my gambling was an addiction for some time, but it was only at the start of the season, with the challenge of the Premiership, that I realised it was getting out of hand. You feel unable to stop yourself doing something, even though you know it is wrong. Unless you have been there, it is difficult to appreciate."



Claridge: happy at Leicester

FOR THE RECORD

BASKETBALL

EUROLEAGUE. Quarter-finals: Third legs. Barcelona (81) 61 Olimpia Lyons (62) Barcelona (81) 61 Olimpia Lyons (62) Barcelona (81) 61 Olimpia Lyons (62)

BOWLS

SWANSEA: C&S (insurance) Welsh Indoor Bowls. Llanelli (M Roberts) v Cardiff (P

Rowlands) v Cardiff (M Roberts) v Cardiff (P

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Future



GOLF 45

Olazabal picks up the swing in New Orleans

SPORT

FOOTBALL 47

Leicester lying in wait for Robson's all-stars



SATURDAY APRIL 5 1997

Irish challenger can extend growing influence of women on famous steeplechase

Antonin looks answer to National

By RICHARD EVANS
RACING CORRESPONDENT

FOR a race, the public perception of which epitomises machismo and derring-do, the Martell Grand National possesses an enduring female streak. During four decades in the middle of this century, Mrs Mirabel Topham made her formidable presence felt as owner of Aintree.

More recently, Jenny Pitman has breached a long-standing male bastion by training Corbiere and Royal Athlete to win the world's most famous steeplechase. In between, Charlotte Brew became the first woman jockey to ride in the race, while both Geraldine Rees and Rosemary Henderson have since gone one better by completing the course.

As the 38 likely runners face the judge this afternoon for the 150th running of the race, the trend could be endorsed as never before in what could turn out to be the Women's National. My shortlist of six for a race expected to attract £65 million in bets contains three horses trained by the fairer sex.

Although Mrs Pitman has suffered a disappointing season by her standards, the victory of Mudahim in the Irish Grand National on Monday showed that her string is returning to form — and both her runners deserve the closest scrutiny, despite having been pulled up on their most recent outings.

Nahthen Lad, owned by a north-erner and pronounced appropriately "now then lad" as opposed to "naythen lad", ended last season by winning the Sun Alliance Chase at

Cheltenham, a race that regularly provides future National winners. Mr Mulligan, second on that occasion, went on to win the Cheltenham Gold Cup this season.

After a delayed start to this campaign, Nahthen Lad ran a lacklustre race at Haydock, after which he was found to have a sore foot. He then ran superbly over an inadequate trip at Chepstow, before being pulled up on fast ground at Cheltenham last month. However, the signs are that he is returning to form. "He's started misbehaving, which means he is coming back to his best," Mrs Pitman said yesterday.

Smith's Band, an outstanding jumper, has raced once this season, when he was pulled up at Newbury five weeks ago. However, he delighted Mrs Pitman in a



Live television coverage from Aintree begins on BBC1 at 1.45pm; the race starts at 3.45

private gallop at the Berkshire course last Saturday. Bought to win the National, he has the assistance of Richard Dunwoody, twice a National winner, but there is a slight stamina doubt.

However, my selection is Antonin, trained by Sue Bramall. Three seasons ago he was one of the most-improved chasers in training, winning both the Racing Post Chase and the Ritz Club Chase, before losing his form in dramatic style.

After signing off last season by finishing eighth in the National but without a win, Mrs Bramall moved from her base at Hutton Sessay, in Yorkshire to Borlough Manor, in Ireland. The change of scenery did the trick and Antonin won the Grand National Trial at Punchestown by a distance six weeks ago.

The preparation for Aintree has gone perfectly and, just as importantly, the revitalised horse is potentially well treated with ten stone as he has plummeted down the handicap during his two disappointing

seasons. Having put in a clear round over the National fences 12 months ago, Antonin can provide the Irish with their first winner since L'Escargot in 1975.

Others to consider include Go Ballistic, fourth in the Cheltenham Gold Cup, who is the form choice but is not certain to take to these fences. Lo Stregone, third in the Hennessy and prepared specifically for this race, stays well but is not nicknamed "Slow Stregone" for nothing.

Sunny Bay is a classy performer, but relishes softer going and Charlie Brooks, his trainer, fears the ground will be too fast. Should overnight rain arrive in sufficient quantity, he would come strongly into the reckoning, along with Wyldie Hyde. The prevailing good ground will encourage supporters

of Avro Anson, who loves to hear his hooves rattle.

Lord Gyllene has improved throughout this season but has done most of his racing at Uttoxeter and was no match last year for the likes of Nahthen Lad or Mr Mulligan. Killashin, an out-and-out stayer who won twice beyond four miles last term, has been carrying big weights all year and looks the best of the outsiders.

However, the horse I fear most is General Wolfe, trained by Tim Forster, who has already sent out the winners of three Nationals. Ignore his disappointing effort at Chepstow four weeks ago as the race came too soon after he had defied top weight when winning at Haydock. He is reported to be back to his best and comes from a yard in top form.

Preparing to risk all in ultimate challenge

Rob Hughes on the dangers faced today by jockeys and their horses

It is difficult to know where to place the eye or the heart at Aintree this morning. The compulsion to see and to enjoy the 150th Grand National pulls us through the turnstile, the profit, the pain, even the ultimate cost of death in the afternoon, preys on our minds.

"This is a business which can injure the soul as much as the body," Steve Smith, Eccles, that tough Derbyshire former National Hunt rider, once opined. As the three-day Aintree meeting that features the Grand National evolved this week, one could hardly get the words out of one's head.

Between the jockeys' room and the winning enclosure, one sees the human cost. Lorcan Wyer, his face meticulously pieced together after a crushing fall — a horse's hoof having been temporarily embedded into the left side of it — is back at Aintree, where he

most successful rider among the probable 38 who go this afternoon, has just experienced 48 hours that would break, never mind injure, the soul of lesser mortals, or less obsessed individuals.

Dunwoody's Thursday was horrendous. In little more than an hour, he partnered One Man, a horse going well until another rider observed: "You've burst, you've burst!" Blood from the nostrils of One Man, by now flowing over Dunwoody's breeches, signalled a burst blood vessel, and Dunwoody instantly pulled up his mount.

In the next race, Mulligan gave Dunwoody a dramatic fall, from which both horse and rider ruefully got to their feet. And then, in the fourth race, the worst experience on the racecourse: Coonawara, taking a daring leap over Becher's, came down the 6ft 9in drop from the top of the fence to the turf, and even a layman could see the hind leg buckle, could sense that this horse would have to be shot to put him out of his misery. It was the first of two fatalities at Aintree so far.

Dunwoody will not offer a word of acknowledgement to the turmoil, the emotion, the dread of race riding, or the sadness that must lodge inside a man who came down from Becher's so despairingly. Ironically, ten years ago, the same Dunwoody had written of Becher's: "You need a clear approach... if you take it a shade long or short, your horse can come down too close to the brook and lose his hind legs."

Today's is the second National of the week. The Irish was on Monday, and ended with two horses dead. Coq Hardi Affair and The Latvian Lark, and later in that Fairyhouse meeting with one rider, Shane Broderick, on a life-support system in a Dublin hospital. He has, at the very least, serious spinal cord injury, and it may seem too little, too late that the Aintree race today has as its special charity appeal a fund for

precisely that type of injury and the welfare of jockeys.

Why do they go on? Dunwoody, again, puts the answers into action more telling than words. By the end of the card on Thursday, he was a winner. By yesterday he was the leading jockey of the Grand National meeting, bringing home three more winners over these demanding obstacles.

In particular on Cyborgo in the 3.30, Dunwoody was the master: with hands, heels and knees, with the whip barely flourished, he communicated his exceptional will-power, his determination to be first past the post, to a talented but allegedly lazy racehorse. Dunwoody niggled, cajoled and drove the animal to carry him through. It was the pulse of

horse racing, the thrill of a huge crowd, perhaps the profit of tens of thousands who back from afar.

Two emotions in one, this racing game, and I was struck by one reaction to the incident at Southwell on Tuesday, where a bolting horse had kicked over an infant's pram, miraculously without harming the child. "It is time they barred prams from racecourses," one observer wrote. Child's play, it is not.

□ Penny A Day, trained by Mary Reveley, was put down after breaking a leg in the Ogbins Handicap Hurdle at Aintree yesterday. The seven-year-old, winner of five races over hurdles and over £37,000, shattered his left fore cannon bone when coming down at the eighth flight.



Stephen Swiers, riding Mr Boston, suffers a crashing fall at the second last in the Martell Fox Hunters Chase at Aintree yesterday

Richardson conquers Black

ANDREW RICHARDSON gave Great Britain a fighting chance of reaching the qualifying round for the Davis Cup last night with the performance of a lifetime to beat Byron Black, of Zimbabwe, in five sets (Alix Ramsay writes). It was Richardson's first Davis Cup appearance, his first five-set match and his first victory over a player ranked in the world's top 50.

Until yesterday, Richardson had been hidden in the relative obscurity of the satellite and challenger

circuits, the first rung on the ladder for journeymen professionals. Overcoming cramp in the final set, he outlasted and outthought the more experienced man.

Black, ranked No 46 in Davis Cup report and photograph — 44

the world, had been very complimentary about his younger opponent, claiming that Richardson's big game could do some damage. However, he probably did

not expect that Richardson could overcome the 220 ranking places that separate them.

"I've never played in an atmosphere like it," Richardson, 23, said afterwards, looking a little non-plussed by it all. "I just tried to control the things that I know I can do well."

"I don't think people thought I could win, but I always thought I had a chance. And now we're level with Zimbabwe. I don't see any reason why Jamie [Delgado] can't beat Byron on Sunday."



At the moment the M4 is littered with roadworks, making the traffic to Heathrow even worse than before. So if you're going to Paris or Brussels, do yourself a favour and take the Eurostar from Waterloo.

Until July, before you fly you've got to crawl.



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Rise



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THE TIMES weekend

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SATURDAY APRIL 5 1997

Business deals on the 19th hole are old hat, but new networkers are now teeing off. **Kathryn Knight reports**



From left: Wendy Hoad, Rhona Tridgell, Karen Manley and Natalie Evans at Hanbury Manor, Hertfordshire. "I wouldn't normally get senior people to my meetings, but as soon as I began playing golf I started to fall over them"

Rise of the iron maidens

Think golf. Images of ruddy-faced executives in diamond pattern V-neck sweaters may spring to mind, networking their way round the course with an assorted bunch of like-minded businessmen on a Thursday afternoon out of the office.

Think women's golf, and you may be forgiven for picturing well-heeled housewives in pastels, snatching a golf afternoon with girl friends.

Now imagine yourself a spectator at Dukesdene golf club in

Croydon on a summer day. You may be surprised. Here, instead of housewives, you will see 50 powerful and impressive professional women from the advertising, marketing and television industries hobnobbing and networking on the fairway for all their worth.

The Laser Ladies' Golf Day, which began last year, was designed so that working women can gather to clink clubs and swap industry gossip. Professional women, it seems, have finally woken up to the career potential offered by

an afternoon discussing pears and birdies.

As a sport and hobby, golf is burgeoning in popularity. In the first half of this decade alone, 476 new courses opened, increasing the number in the British Isles by almost 30 per cent. But traditionally, like the shooting party and the gentleman's club, the businessman's golf day and its myriad networking opportunities have tended to exclude women. Indeed, women in most golf clubs are strictly second best, either banned from playing on certain

days, or limited to playing at certain hours.

At Laser, an ITV airtime sales house and part of the Granada group, Kerry Ann Klopfer was tired of watching her bosses sloping off to industry golf days and hogging all the schmooze possibilities. Together with Karen Manley and other colleagues, she set up the company's first ladies golf day for any women in the same line of business who wanted both to learn to play and get to know each other in the process. "Almost all of our management

and directors are men and play golf, so they get the chance to go to golf industry days where they can meet. We wanted to see what all the fuss was about, and also we knew there is enormous potential for networking on the golf course," Kerry Ann says.

After mailing 250 women, she received an enthusiastic yes from nearly half of them in just three days. Six weeks later, 33 of them gathered at Dukesdene on a hot July day.

"I think women can have a hard time from men on the golf

course, and while many of them want to get involved in these circles they are a bit frightened that they can't penetrate them," Kerry Ann says.

Some of the women were novices, some experienced golfers. Some had brought clients with them, some had brought a friend. Everyone wanted to play the chaps at their own game. "It was really very good for business, because we got women from lots of different parts of the industry together in an informal setting so we could get to know each other in a free

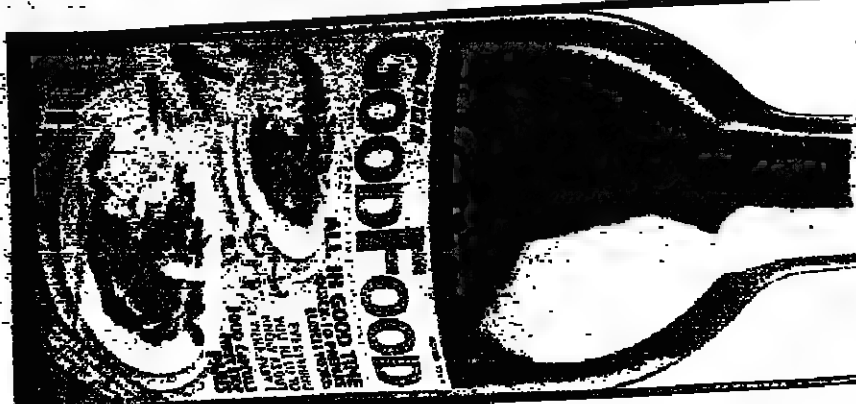
and unpressurised environment. We had tremendous fun, and have had lots of calls from women demanding to know when the next one is."

The new woman golfer could be a positive role model for aspiring Nineties woman. Well dressed, articulate and jolly, they are all extremely busy, the kind of people who are skiing one week and in New York for a meeting the next. It is a wonder they find the time to play golf at all. But like any

Continued on page 2

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Much of what I was taught at school has turned out to be useless, but seldom have I found it to be wrong. The way I was taught to put together a peg bag with my initials embroidered on the outer pocket is, I am sure, as close to the correct method as it is possible to learn. Should I ever have to make a Norwegian upside-down pudding, or a Hawaiian beefburger, or a poker, or a forged historical document with its edges singed in the oven, then I am confident my technique is sound.

There is one piece of information I was given, however, that I have found to be spectacularly erroneous. It was given in a geography lesson. We were studying town planning, plotting the positions of the Central Business District (CBD — remember that?), the

OBD, the suburbs and so forth on maps. We were given a list of different sorts of shops and a blank high street — and told to sketch in where we thought the shops would be. And they say educational standards were higher 20 years ago than they are today.

"Obviously," said the teacher, with the withering scorn of which only geography and PE teachers (the latter turn into the former when their cruciate ligaments give way) are truly capable, "the butchers will not all be next to each other, they will space themselves out along the street."

Wrong. As anyone with eyes knows, next to each other is exactly where the butchers — or bakers, or the department stores — will want to be. They will crawl over broken glass to site their shops next to

SERIOUS SHOPPING

someone already selling precisely the same thing.

I was reminded of this lesson the other day on Tottenham Court Road in London, which proves how hugely wrong my geography teacher was. It is the mass-market electronics centre for London, for Britain, and possibly — judging by the number of Belgians and Swedes you see there carting away large oblong boxes — north-western Europe. The southern half of Tottenham Court Road — aside from one or two pornographers — only has electronics shops. In theory, Tottenham Court Road provides that rare chance for the British shopper — the chance to



ROBERT CRAMPTON

haggle. Hagglers are one of those foreign arts of which we, as a people, are deeply suspicious, deeply in awe and deeply ignorant. But I thought I should give it a try.

HAGGLING

I went into the biggest shop I could see and found a man called Tony. We had a long conversation. Not far into it, Tony had convinced me without any effort that the portable CD player I wanted to buy was in fact a Sony Sports Discman with ESP. ESP does not mean the machine can see into the future or bend spoons, it means it has Electronic Shock Protection — an anti-jump device. Tony dropped it on the counter as proof. I was impressed. It cost £269 — well over twice as much as all of the others. Nonetheless, I decided I just had to have it.

Craftily, I did not tell Tony. I hummed and hahhed. I asked lots

of questions, the sort of questions I always ask when I buy something whose working parts I cannot see, do not understand, and suspect don't work. Each question was a variant of: "Please, Tony, tell me, will it break?" Tony assured me that it would not. Batteries? Yes. Guarantee? One year. From the manufacturer? Indeed.

Now we stood and looked at the machine on the counter for a long while, saying nothing. Tony began to yawn. Eventually, he said that he felt he could offer it at £242.10p. I said, right, I'll think about it. Feeling terribly sophisticated, I left. I was with three friends. We all dispersed along the Tottenham Court Road and sought the price of the same model in the other shops.

Prices varied from £269 less 10 per cent (which, one of my friends pointed out, was what Tony had offered) to £230. I was terribly excited by this.

One of my friends said I should buy the one for £230. I said no, no. There was much talk of 100 per cent mark-ups, of Tony's thirst for a commission, of entrepreneurship thriving in the spring sunshine. I went back to Tony. I've been offered this for £230 down the road, I said. He looked bored. One-year's guarantee, batteries included. Tony stifled a yawn. "Oh, right," he said. I said: "Will you sell it to me for less?" "No," he said, and I realised that not only are British shoppers embarrassed by haggling, but British shop assistants nursing bad hangovers are too.

Making a stand for umbrellas

MAKE a splash with a distinctive umbrella stand, to instantly liven up the hallway. Just as umbrellas have become a more stylish accessory, many of these designs will make an impact come rain or shine, says Sudi Pigott

TOP ROW (left to right): Natural stand made from twigs wrapped with plywood bands, £47.50, from Graham & Greene, 4, 7 and 10 Elgin Crescent, W11 (0171-727 4594).

Handwoven, handpainted birch ply and dyed cane umbrella stand in bright shades of blue/yellow/pink designed by Lois Walpole, £52 plus £4.50 p&p, from Rapid Eye (0171-538 6308).

Gamekeeper in Barbour/shooting gear handpainted cut-out stand, £220, from General Trading Company, 144 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-730 0411).

Denison Drake Designs fabric and braid covered Mary Poppins-style stand divided into six compartments with brass ball or handpainted thistle, frog, owl or bird handle, £289, from Harrods, Age of Elegance Dept, Knightsbridge, SW1 (0171-730 1234).

Blue and yellow painted china stand, £39.50, from India Jane, 131-133 King's Road, SW3 (0171-351 1080).

Elegant made-to-order leather umbrella stands (allow six to eight weeks), from £249, from Bill Amberg, 10 Chepstow Road, W2 (0171-727 3580).

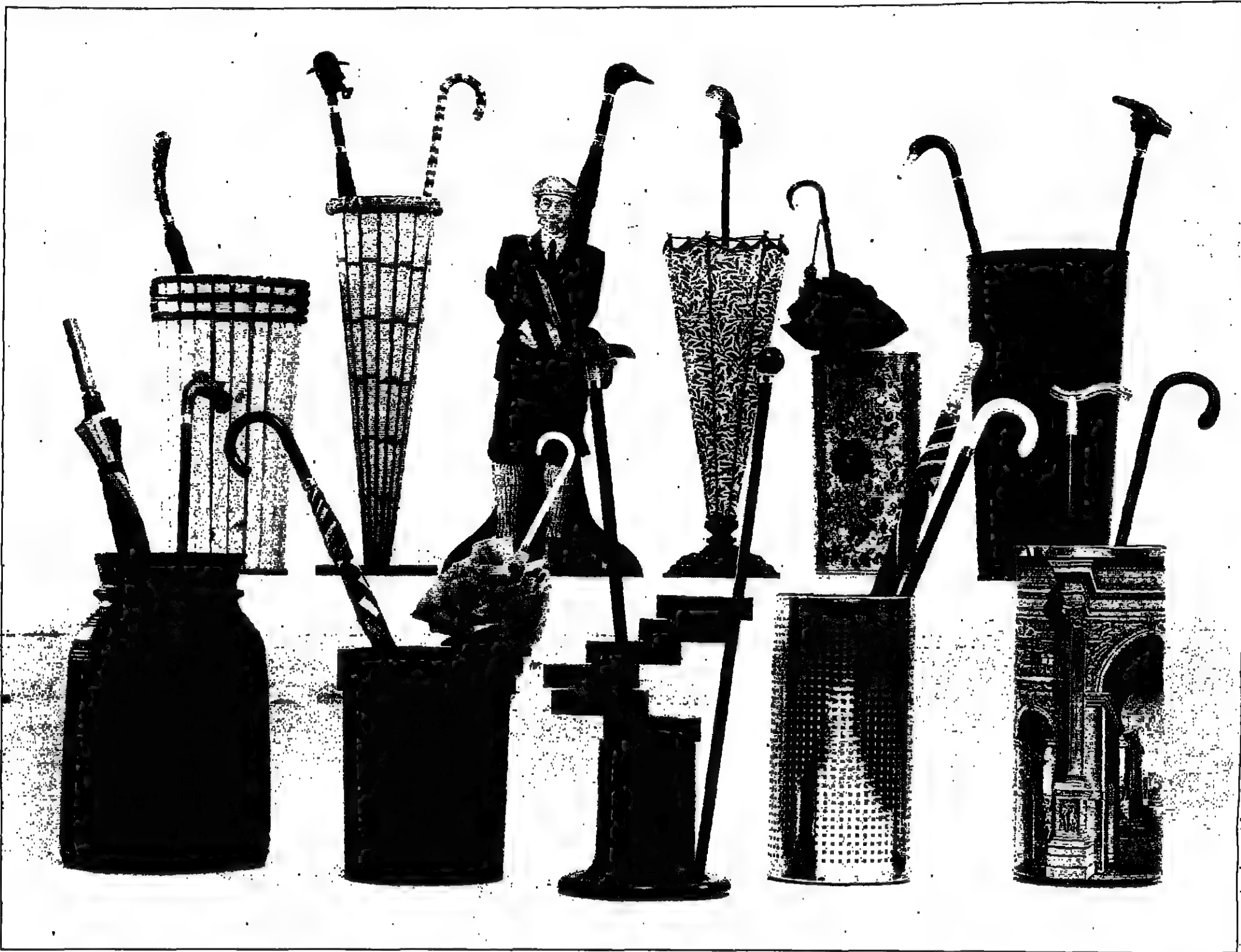
BOTTOM ROW (left to right): Original tall teak grain measure, from a selection around £175, from India Jane, as before. Authentic opaque blue plastic stand (available in other colours), £23, from the Conran Shop, Michelin House, 81 Fulham Road, SW3 (0171-589 7493).

Original 1980s plastic swirl retro-design in red or orange, £140, from Themes & Variations, 231 Westbourne Grove, W11 (0171-727 5531).

Chrome cylinder in square-hole perforated design with removable drip saucer, £34.95, from The Source, 28-40 Kensington High Street, W8 (0171-937 2626).

Modern Pomasetti design with black and white architectural columns, £450, from Themes & Variations, as before.

Photograph by Des Jensen. Styling by Caroline Griffiths. All umbrellas and walking sticks from James Smith & Son, 53 New Oxford Street, WC1 (0171-836 4731).

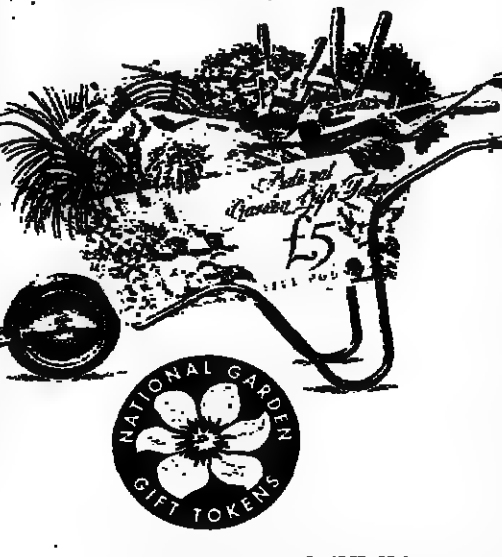


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NATIONAL GARDEN GIFT TOKENS
Horticultural Trades Association (established 1898)
Theale, Berkshire.

'You can short-cut your way to meeting senior people'

Continued from page 1
new convert they have embraced the sport with gusto and when they do play, they make the most of it.

Rhona Triggell, aged 39, a media and communications director for the advertising agency Foote Cone Belding, is a keen preacher of the golfing gospel and the opportunities it affords. She attends as many industry golf days with media companies, marketing and ad agencies as she can.

"You can really short-cut your way to meeting influential people," she says. "I get to meet many more senior people who normally wouldn't come to my meetings, but as soon as I began playing golf I started to fall over them."

Rhona started playing a few years ago after finding an accessible golf club that welcomed women with the same warmth as it did men. "I had been toying with taking up golf for a long time but had been a bit overawed by the male-dominated aspect. Now I can easily go to a golf day a week throughout the summer. I've made so many useful contacts," she says.

"It's nice to know that if I need to I can ring the top man in the company, or say to people you work with 'let's have a round of golf'. It's a good way of accessing people as friends and contacts."

As a fundraiser for the advertising industry's charity NABS, Rhona's sister, Helen, also finds her ability to play a few holes very useful.

"It's a new format for fundraising, I used to work in the industry itself and now I can call people I used to work with and ask myself along to their golf days, because it's good for contacts, and for fundraising it's a nice environ-

ment in which to chat up people."

For many of these networks there is no feminist agenda, no "up and at 'em" attitude about men. They love golf and find the contacts they make often turn out to be men.

Natalie Evans, the group marketing manager for the GWR direct marketing association, says: "You don't necessarily talk business on the course but it's a great way of cementing relationships."

"Last year a guy from Texas came over to work for us. He played golf with me and then invited me over to Texas, where I met a lot of people in the radio business. We had a great time and it was good to know I'd made the contacts over there."

Nonetheless, the more hard-headed will realise how attractive the potential rewards are. John Viney, the chairman of the headhunting firm Heidrick and Struggles, knows the areas of recruitment, networking and career development intimately. Women, he believes, are contending on to advantageous networking opportunities that have previously been inaccessible.

"In the past, women have been barred from the big occasions where men got together and swapped ideas, such as the grouse shoot and the gentlemen's club," he says.

"They've had to be content with social or sexual power. But women are learning to network in the same way that men have done for years. Obviously it's a slow process but it's a significant change."

Indeed, Ann Scott, who runs her own PR agency, Ann Scott Associates, regrets she didn't pursue the holy grail of business golf earlier. "When I took up golf the business side was completely incidental. I just wanted a nice way to keep fit,



A swing to networking

JUDY JACKSON (above), a media manager for Barclaycard in London, does not play golf. Saturday afternoons often see her at a football match with work colleagues, but so far she has been unable to penetrate their golf outings. So she is taking up the sport. "It would be worth taking a few lessons, enough to wield a club without embarrassment, and have a day on the course with them," she says. "I can see the advantages of golf in business. My colleagues are male and always playing golf. They never think to ask me because it's not the sort of thing you can go along to if you're not a vaguely adequate player. I miss out because of it. The great thing about it is that it gives you time to talk. It's not like squash where you're so out of breath you can't speak. It also creates a real bond."

"It's a good way to cement relationships with colleagues, for external networking and increasing your profile."

but I am completely overwhelmed by the professional impact of playing golf.

"It's a great asset to be able to play. It's a wonderful way of getting to know people better, as you're sharing a great common interest."

However at 25, Laura Job has seen the golfing light in good time. A client manager for the ad agency TMD Carat, she took a client from Nissan to the Laser day last year. "We had a laugh and it cemented our relationship in an informal environment in a way that was useful to us both. She could introduce me to potential clients and I could introduce her to other people from the agency."

Laura took her first lessons last summer and hopes that in a year or so she will be swinging her club with the best of them. "You meet such a wide variety of people at all levels, and it's nice to see them out of a suit and out of a business context. It's especially good for me because I'm

relatively young and it's nice for me to be able to mix with people much further up the hierarchy."

Over the past three years the number of women members of golf clubs has risen by 25,000 in England alone. Sports shops and department stores are reflecting this burgeoning interest.

James Wilson, the UK vice-president of sales and marketing at Kelloway Golf, the largest manufacturer of golf equipment in the world, is in no doubt. "Ten per cent of our manufacturing business in the UK is now for women, and it's growing all the time."

"Working women's golf is opening up and this is reflected in our marketing. We use more lady golfers in our advertising now."

At Marks & Spencer, the natty range of golfing wear for women shows how the winds of change have blown over the nation's courses. From next month, look out for navy, pale blue and lime.

When Wendy Hoad, who runs a golf PR business, started playing a few years ago and was often one of a small number of women on company golf days. Now, she says, there is a noticeable surge in women on the course.

"I think there has been a gradual erosion of the masculine culture that used to surround golf. It's not that men have been hostile but that women have not chosen to take part."

"Now there's a cultural shift: there's much more publicity given to women's golf generally, more ladies golf on television, and clubs are opening up," she says.

If you're left in any doubt about the relentless march of businesswomen's shoes on the

golf course, Helen Triggell has a revealing anecdote.

"I was a guest at a grand dinner for the Solus club, a men-only club for very senior people in marketing and advertising," she recalls. "It was a mostly male occasion but at one point I was in the loo next to a highly respected businesswoman and found we were chatting away about our golf and how the wet and windy weather was playing havoc with our plans."

"It seemed ironic that at this very masculine dinner we were the ones having the golf conversation, in the ladies' loo."

10 WOMEN-FRIENDLY GOLF CLUBS

MANY golf clubs still treat women as second-class citizens. But those listed are among the best for fair play, either allowing women on to their committees or not restricting the times or days they may play.

- Coxmoor, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire (01623 557359).
- Brockenhurst Manor, Brockenhurst, Hampshire (01590 623333).
- St Enodoc, Wadebridge, Cornwall (01208 663216).
- Trevose, Padstow, Cornwall (01841 520208).
- Denham, Denham, Buckinghamshire (01895 832022).
- West Kilbride, Seamill, West Kilbride, Scotland (01294 823911).
- Wentworth, Virginia Water, Surrey (01344 842201).
- West Hill, Brookwood, Surrey (01483 474565).
- Bristol and Clifton, Clifton, Bristol (01275 393474).
- Vale of Llangollen, Llangollen, Denbighshire (01788 860909).

Conjure up images of simple glamour in two-tone combinations of stripes and swirls, says Heath Brown

Black and white MAGIC

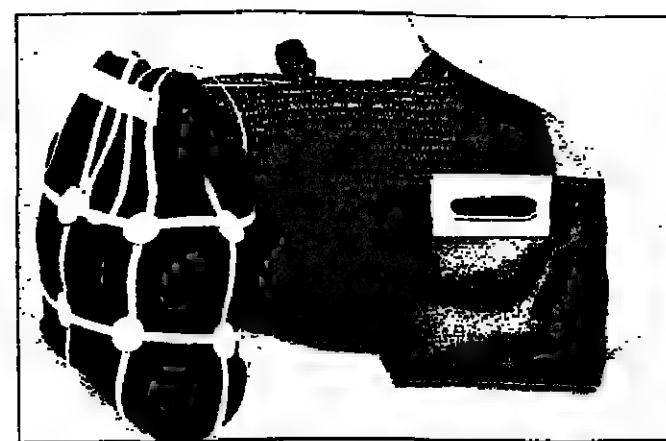
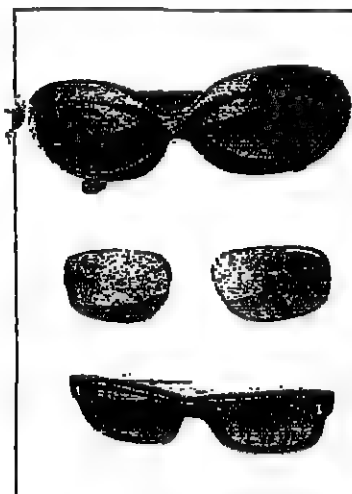
The classic combination of black-with white will always be in vogue. Shades and styles go in and out of favour but monochrome remains a timeless investment. Black is flattering, disguises those extra pounds gained over the winter and makes cheaper clothes appear more expensive. But it can look a little dull worn on its own in the summer. By adding a cool, crisp, white contrast you can create a lighter, summery look. It instantly brightens up an outfit without looking garish and gives a sophisticated edge to the simplest of styles.

Try wide palazzo trousers with a simple white blouse, or strappy tops with plain skirts or dresses. Mixing the two colours is an effortless way of creating glamour and elegance. This season the ever-so-fashionable stripe looks great in black and white. Dresses with vertical "bars" are a good buy

for those who wish to appear taller, but beware of horizontal striping as it makes you look wider or an unnatural shape. The less harsh horizontal swirls and undulating stripes, however, are an exception as they divert attention away from the body.

A black and white capsule wardrobe for the holiday season can take the hassle out of packing. The essential garment to go into the suitcase must be a plain black or white swimsuit. This has been a best-seller for years and is versatile enough to be worn beneath a sheer white shirt or as a top with trousers.

Accessories are easy to find with fabulous sunglasses, two-tone bags and hair clips. Shoes come in wild zebra-print leathers, or go for sandals and mules in brilliant white or matt black. But remember not to go too far with the accessories or it can create a *My Fair Lady* costume look.



MAIN PICTURE: Swirl print tunic, £305; matching pants, £255, Laurel, 105 New Bond Street, London W1 (0171-493 1153). Black headscarf/sarong, £12, Marks & Spencer, selected branches (0171-935 4422). Large silver hoop earrings, £22, Agatha, 4 South Molton Street, W1 (0171-495 2779).

LEFT: Fine stripe stretch top, £18, Warehouse, branches nationwide (0171-278 3491). Black kick-pleat skirt, £54, Jigsaw, 126-127 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-491 4484). Headscarf/sarong, Marks & Spencer, as before. Earrings, Agatha, as before.

RIGHT: Black jersey dress with white stripes, £135, Whistles, 12 St Christopher's Place, W1 (0171-487 4484). White floppy hat, £22, Dollargrand, Selfridges, W1 (0171-794 3028). Patent thong sandals, £27.50, Wallis, selected branches nationwide (0181-910 1333). Headscarf/sarong, as before. Earrings, as before.

Photographs by Richard Burns. Hair and make-up by Sarah Gottschick using Glauca Rossi Products (mail order, 0171-289 7485). Styling by Amandip Uppal.

BAGS: (from left) Black satin bag with white leather cage, £215, Marc Cain, 28 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-637 4142). Black raffia bag, £12.99, Accessorize, 0171-313 3000. Black leather bag with white handle, £44.95, Klan, Fenwicks, W1; Selfridges, W1 (0171-629 1234). (White floppy hat, £14.99, Accessorize, as before).

SHOES: (from left) Black leather wedge mules, £59.99, Dune, 66-68 High Street Kensington, W8 (0171-795 6336). White patent flat mules, £29.99, Rin Tin Tin, Faith, 74 Oxford Street, W1 (0800 289297). Zebra print mules, £125, Armando Pollini, 35 Brook Street, W1 (0171-629 7606). Flat strappy sandals, £20, Clarks, branches nationwide (0990 785888).

SUNGLASSES: (from top) Black Jackie O frame sunglasses, £119, Fendi, all leading opticians nationwide (01923 249491). White frame sunglasses, £62, Armand Basl, 14 Floral Street, WC2 (0171-278 4843). Black and white sunglasses, £98, Cutler & Gross, 16 Knightsbridge Green, SW1; Harvey Nichols, SW1 (0171-581 2250).



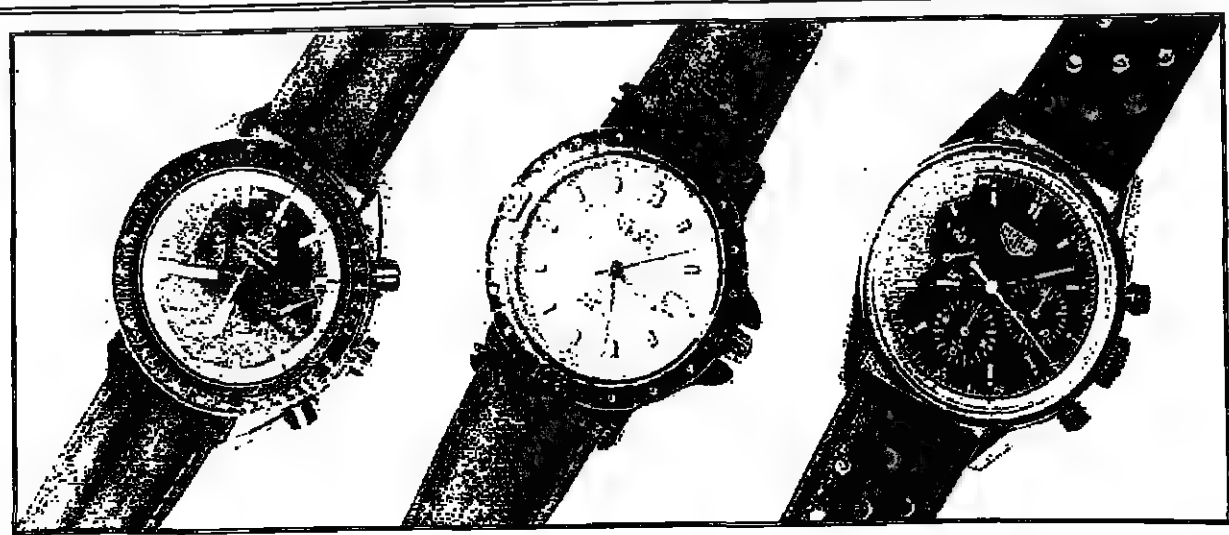
THREE OF A KIND

A GOOD design never goes out of fashion and these three authentic, traditional men's watches are classic examples. H.B.

Red leather strap automatic Speedmaster Racing watch, £350, Omega, Mappin & Webb, 170 Regent Street, London W1; Watches Of Switzerland, 16 New Bond Street, W1 (01703 611612).

Brown leather strap automatic watch, £65.99, Next, branches nationwide (0116-284 9424).

Black punched leather strap Heuer Carrera Limited Edition watch, £1,495, Tag Heuer, Watches Of Switzerland, nationwide (01204 861163).



Designer way to go organic

The rear view in the car was nothing but greenery, and the powerful sweet-sour boy smell a glorious promise of things to come at home.

٥٥١ من الاصل

A topiary castle fit for a queen

Stephen Anderton
on the careful
nurturing of
semi-mature trees

Have you ever bought something at a charity plant sale only to find it had been stuffed into the pot only a couple of days beforehand and all the soil falls off? It happens.

Before you buy, it may be some comfort, then, to know what happens to the semi-mature trees costing between £100 and several thousand pounds. In fact, it is the work involved in caring for them that makes them expensive.

It is a bit like buying an oven-ready turkey: the tree must be absolutely ready to go into the ground. The rootball should be just filling the pot — if I can call something the size of a dustbin a pot — but not pot-bound. The best containerised trees will not have spent years being endlessly potted on, but will have grown in a nursery in the open ground for as many as ten to 15 years, having the top carefully shaped and the roots regularly pruned and undercut to keep them bushy.

When the time comes for containerisation, the trees are lifted by machine and potted up in a container which the roots will fill over the next 12 to 18 months. A good grower will aim to sell on those trees in that first or second season, when the roots have grown out to grip all the soil in the pot but before they start to spiral and become pot-bound.

Moving a container holding 200 to 300 litres of compost as well as an enormous multi-stem tree is no easy task. Fork-lifts and heavy machinery are required both to move the trees to their standing ground and also to install them at planting time.

At Walmer Castle in Kent, English Heritage has asked Penelope Hobhouse and Simon Johnson to design a garden for Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, who is Warden of the Cinque Ports. It lies within a 19th-century walled garden, and this month has seen the lifting in of many mature limes and yews to form the structure of the garden. Well, at the age of 96 it is worth paying for a quick effect, isn't it?

The seven-metre, broad-leaved limes were individually selected for shape in Holland more than a year ago, and are being planted with a



Penelope Hobhouse monitors the planting of 20-year-old trees in the Queen Mother's Garden at Walmer Castle in Kent

large rootball but without having been containerised. They will be given invisible, underground guys to ensure that they stay upright.

Also being installed are plants for a long yew hedge and a three-metre topiary castle of yew. Tendercare, the suppliers, has been growing the castle for the past year in a corner of its nursery, ensuring that the roots are ready for a quick getaway when they are planted on the new raised turf mound. They have also begun the formative clipping of the yews, training them to form the three dense arches and castellations of the castle. The jigsaw was disassembled for transport and reassembled after negotiating the garden wall.

On an instant box parterre, Tendercare has also been growing the shape of two Es (for Elizabeth). The hedging has been planted in dozens of wire troughs, clipped and fed hard throughout the past season. It was protected from frost with horticultural fleece and is ready for slotting into place this spring.

After installation, the care of all this expensive planting becomes the

- WEEKEND TIPS**
- Prepare to spray outbreaks of aphids on greenhouse plants as the weather warms up.
 - Clip summer-flowering heathers as the new shoots begin to grow.
 - Plant potatoes, starting with the earliest varieties.
 - Plant gladioli 6in deep, and set them on sand in heavy soils.
 - Protect wall blossom and early-flowering shrubs against sudden night frost with netting or fleece.
 - Pot some roots of mint for early growth on a windowsill.

daunting responsibility of the new head gardener, Richard Squires. But how does anyone look after the watering of acres of containerised trees in a nursery?

At Tendercare, 90 per cent of all the containers are on drip-pegs, which deliver a correct amount of water to the surface of the pot. Where watering is by sprinkler, the excess is recycled from the sloping standing grounds. But here is the clever bit: the water supply to the drip-pegs includes a gentle liquid feed to ensure that every inch of growth is made. In spring the feed is high in nitrogen to

induce a strong leaf and shoots. But in autumn the balance tips towards potash to slow down and ripen growth. In spring the plants, particularly evergreens, are given a seaweed-based liquid feed as well.

Constant feeding really does pay off, and it is a treat to see the great ribs of gunnera and phormium and ferns ready to make instant foliage gardens, or rows of pre-formed espalier apples, pears and plums ready to dress a tall wall.

Is it worth a gardener investing in this kind of expensive planting? On occasion I think the answer is yes.

The purchase of just one big specimen tree can add enormous maturity to a new garden. When everything else is small and low and new, it lifts the eye and calms the scene.

And the transplanting of mature trees is nothing new. The grand Victorian landscape gardeners took great pride in it. Then it went out of fashion for 100 years. Now, again, it is readily available, and with the assistance of modern technology and machinery, it is easier than ever.

Gardeners on exposed sites should continue to plant small for greatest success, but for impact in a normally sheltered garden, it can be well worth spending £100 on a big specimen tree. You are not just buying a tree and someone's work on it; you are buying time, which cannot be priced. Just remember when you go on holiday, that whoever cuts your lawn must also water the tree in its first year.

At Tendercare, Southlands Road, Denham, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB9 4HD (01895 835544).

Meet Penelope Hobhouse and Tim Smit, page 14

GARDEN ANSWERS



STEPHEN ANDERTON
replies to readers' letters

Q I have dug over two 10ft x 10ft plots where I used to keep hives. I would now like to establish wildflower areas. Can you suggest where I might buy a suitable seed mixture to save me buying individual packets of wildflowers from a garden centre? The soil is chalky and south-facing. M. Kendall, Ramsbury, Wiltshire.

A Wildflower meadows take time to establish. Seed mixtures selected for particular soil types include showy annuals such as poppies for the first year, but they are flowers of cultivated land and do not persist in turf. The longer-term wildflowers take a few years to establish. Also, if the soil is rich, coarse self-sown grasses dominate at the expense of wildflowers and the lighter grasses in the seed mix. In small areas like this, I would be inclined to add plugs or plantlets of perennial wildflowers as well as seed. The results will be faster. Contact John Chambers' Wild Flower Seeds, 15 Westleigh Road, Barton Seagrave, Kettering, Northamptonshire NN15 5AJ (01933 652562).

Q I would love to have two of those slender "finger" cypresses which are such an attractive feature of the Italian landscape. Five years ago I was given a cone full of seeds but none germinated. Will they grow here, and could I buy one? I think I have seen them in the south of the country once or twice. — J. Lefley, Stanmore, Hampshire.

A *Cypripedium sempervirens* 'Strica' is the plant. It is seriously under threat from disease in the Mediterranean areas. Can you suggest where I might buy a suitable seed mixture to save me buying individual packets of wildflowers from a garden centre? The soil is chalky and south-facing. M. Kendall, Ramsbury, Wiltshire.

Hardier alternatives, if less slender, might be the incense cedar *Colocedrus decurrens*, or a form of Lawson cypress called 'Wissellii', which is a dark-bluish green. Don't be lobbied off with pencil junipers such as 'Skyrocket', which are only shrubs.

Q Have you any suggestions for dealing with dog mess in the garden? It decomposes very slowly on the grass cuttings heap. Is there a product to speed up this process? — S. Cox, Axbridge, Somerset.

A It is not a good idea to add dog excrement to compost heaps. It can contain organisms leading to toxocarosis, which may cause blindness in children. My preference is to dig the occasional hole in some rooty, ungardened corner under trees, and put it there, where it can rot away in contact with no one.

Readers should write to: Garden Answers, Weekend, The Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN. Advice is offered without legal responsibility. The Times regrets that any enclosure cannot be returned.

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COUNTRY LIFE

Cream of Cornish gardens

■ Cotehele, St Dominick, near Saltash, Cornwall (01579 350434)

Eight miles southwest of Tavistock. Open daily, 11am-dusk. £2.80, family ticket £7

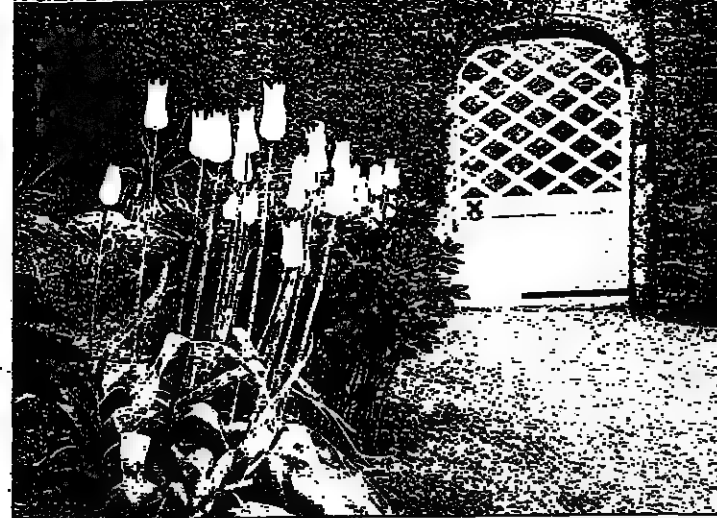
THIS magical National Trust property is nestled into the western banks of the Tamar river, which marks the boundary between Devon and Cornwall. Large herbaceous borders trace the length of each of the terraces leading down from the 15th-century manor.

As you walk down the steps running centrally through this formal area to what is apparently a sweep of countryside, look out for a small, inconspicuous tunnel which leads under part of the garden to an informal, sheltered valley with a fish pond at its head and a grey stone, dome-shaped dovecote.

In typically fecund Cornish style the valley vegetation is huge and seemingly only just being kept under control: ferns sprout out of walls and trees, moss and lichen cling to every surface and hostas and primulas thrive. There are palms, acacia, hydrangeas and beulas, and the massive jungle-like leaves of gunnera beside the stream. You should just be in time to see the last of the magnificent magnolias, camellias and rhododendrons in flower.

There are ten acres to explore and then the paths criss-cross down to the 19th-century quay beside the Tamar. This is an ideal place to have a picnic and look over the outstation of the National Maritime Museum.

ANDREW LAWSON



Cotehele is a magical garden near the Tamar river in Cornwall

OPEN THIS WEEKEND

■ Glenwhan Garden, Dunragit by Stranraer, Wigtownshire, Dumfries and Galloway (01591 400222)

Seven miles east of Stranraer, one mile off the A75. Open daily, 10am-5pm. £2, children £1.50

THIS is regarded as one of Scotland's important gardens although it was only started in 1979 by the Knott family. When they began work the area was rigid with gorse and bracken, but it has the great advantage of the Gulf Stream to keep the climate mild and make it a virtually frost-free pocket. By

now the primula arena should be at its best, and the rhododendrons are providing colour. Since last year a lot of the vegetation has been hacked back to give new vistas across Luce Bay and the Mull of Galloway, and to make a new woodland walk.

At the centre of the gardens is a large informal pool which can be traced by the rushing stream that feeds it. A causeway crosses the pool and gives a better look at the packed planting, some of it unusual, around the perimeter. The Knott's nursery, which is attached to the gardens, is well-stocked with plants and very tempting.

■ Bampton Manor and Weald Manor Gardens, Oxfordshire (01993 850224)

On A4095 Witney-Faringdon road. Open April 6, 2-5.30pm. £1.50 for combined ticket to see both private gardens, which open once a year for charity

WEALD MANOR is a three-acre garden with a small wood and lake. There is a mass of spring bulbs, a few fritillaries and some topiary. The owners modestly maintain that the main point of visiting the garden is for the teas, which annually raise a great deal of money for the National Gardens Scheme. Bampton Manor, a small chunk of this garden, was owned until her death 15 years ago by the gardener Peggy Munster. The bulk of the building is Georgian and it has inspired the Department of the Environment to list the brick and flint walls.

The garden opens once a year for charity at the moment when the spring garden should be at its peak, with daffodils, blue wood anemones, dwarf tulips and hyacinths. In the rest of the four acres there are cream, pink and white prunus, a mass of hellebores, crown imperials and two ponds — one a circular stone with a fountain at the centre, the other informal. Yew and stone boundaries separate one part of the garden from the next, structural work which stands as a memorial to Peggy Munster.

The gardens are open by appointment at other times of year.

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Falling prices and a strong pound are attracting British buyers to French property. Cheryl Taylor on finding the bargains



Three-bedroom stone-built house in the village of Najac, Aveyron, for sale at £63,000



This country house in the hills behind St Tropez was on sale at £1.1 million in 1994 but with the improved exchange rate recently sold for just £750,000

Homes with a continental drift

The strength of the pound against the French franc — having gained 17 per cent in value over the past six months — and the recession in the French domestic housing market have encouraged British buyers to look again at property across the Channel.

Unlike the UK housing market, which has improved over the past two years, the French market is still in the doldrums, prices having fallen in some areas by 30-40 per cent since 1990. Agents say prices in France have now bottomed out and buyers are returning, but there is no rush to buy and purchasers are more discerning.

Paddy Dring of Knight Frank's international department, which handles properties for sale in Provence and the French Alps, says: "Until recently, the strength of the franc continued to deter British buyers, but the tables have been turned. Low prices combined with a strong pound have suddenly made French property an attractive and affordable proposition."

There have been dramatic price reductions in Provence, although property here is still "over-ripe". Knight Frank has recently sold a palatial country house with 7.5 acres in the hills behind St Tropez. When it came on the market in 1994 at £9 million, it would have cost £1.1 million. The price was reduced to £6.5 million last summer, which at the time was worth £860,000. Now, with the improved exchange rate, it is £750,000 — a drop of more than a third.

There are bargains too in the Dordogne, where there are now so many Britons with second homes that the French call it "Little England". A restored five-bedroom house, with an attached holiday cottage, barn, garage and walled garden, in a village in the northeast of the Dordogne was on the books of the French Property Shop a year ago at £1 million, then costing £133,000. Now it is priced at £750,000, about £81,000.

In the south of France, British purchasers priced out of Provence are moving westwards to Languedoc Roussillon in search of better value. The area around Perpignan is the poor man's riviera, with a Mediterranean coastline and a rash of new resorts aimed at low-budget French tourists. However, its rugged hinterland is scattered with pretty hilltop villages and some lovely old houses for less than £50,000.

The weather is hot and dry in summer and property prices are much cheaper than on the Côte d'Azur. A habitable two-bedroom cottage in hilltop village, near Prades, a 45-minute drive from the sea, costs about £35,000. A four-bedroom stone-built farmhouse in good condition, with fine views and a swimming pool, will fetch about £120,000.

There is growing interest too in the Aude Valley, the southernmost part of Languedoc, inland from Narbonne. With its famous vineyards, feudal castles and fortified cities. Rustic properties are now in short supply, but you might find an

old stone house for £50,000. But avoid homes without water and electricity; installation of essential services can cost a fortune here.

Nigel Paige of Authentic France reports a brisk trade in village houses further east in the Hérault, around Pézenas, a 30-minute drive from the sea. Clustered around a square, a church and a boules pitch, houses cost about £25,000 for anything that is habitable. They usually lack any type of garden, but often have beautiful views from upper terraces. A six-bedroom maison viticole (winegrower's house) can be bought for £50,000 to £100,000.

Many Britons are looking to settle permanently in France, often with a view to retirement, particularly in the southwest, where the houses are bigger, the weather is warmer and property more reasonably priced.

According to Sarah Francis of French property specialist Sifex, leisure is an increasingly important factor for many British buyers. Well-located properties in areas such as the Gers, the Lot, the Lot et Garonne, the Aveyron and the Tarn, within a two-hour drive of the Atlantic coast and winter skiing in the Pyrenees, are sought after and harder to find, she says.

South of the Dordogne, the Lot is hotter and drier, with a more arid landscape and a number of modest rural dwellings priced from £50,000. An old village house for modernisation in one of the medi-

eval hilltop villages would cost from £50,000; the restored version from £80,000.

A huge white-stone farmhouse for conversion, with enough land to graze a few horses, can be found for £70,000 near Cahors, an area famous for its full-bodied red wines. Converted and modernised, these fetch from £130,000 with a swimming pool.

Prices slip further east in the Lot et Garonne, where a restored five-bedroom house in a village near Montaigne de Quercy is on offer at £57,000 through the French Property Shop.

South of the Lot, the sunflower-filled département of the Tarn, between the Massif Central and the Pyrenees, is off the tourist track and prices are low. Stone-built cottages,

farmbuildings and village houses around Gaillac or Albi, about a 45-minute drive from Toulouse, can be found for a fraction of the price of those in Provence.

The stock of rural dwellings has diminished as more buyers move to the Tarn in search of better value, but you can still pick up a small village house from £30,000. For £50,000 you can buy a habitable three-bedroom cottage with a garden. A restored country house, with up to five bedrooms and land around, costs about £150,000.

The Aveyron is a sparsely populated mountainous département on the edge of the southwest, about a two-hour drive from Toulouse airport, or ten hours from Calais. Situated between the Lot and the Tarn, it is green and fertile, crisscrossed by rivers and full of lakes. It has an historic capital in Rodez, ancient walled towns and villages, dramatic gorges and the limestone caves where Roquefort cheese is ripened.

Despite its many attractions, the Aveyron tends to be ignored by British property buyers and prices are low. There is a good range of property from stone cottages and farmbuildings to large country houses with outbuildings and sizeable acreages.

You can buy a large stone farmhouse with a rambling old barn and a well, but without mains water or electricity, from £25,000. Restored with converted outbuildings and a swimming pool, the same property might fetch £80,000. A renovated two or three-bedroom

village house, with a garden, costs about £40,000.

Further west, the Gers, close to the foothills of the Pyrenees and famous for its foie gras and Bery Armagnac brandy, continues to attract British buyers in search of large Gascon-style country houses, stone-built with wooden shutters, in good condition for under £120,000.

Now there is renewed interest in the Pas de Calais, particularly the area south of Boulogne, which has a rolling green landscape scattered with picturesque river valleys and some delightful wooded areas.

You could find a number of pretty villages and some interesting old towns, including Hesdin, Samer and the walled city of Montreuil-sur-Mer, with its cobble streets and medieval ramparts. This was the boom area of the late 1980s; conveniently placed for a quick hop to France, the area seemed ideal for a weekend retreat and many British buyers paid over-the-odds for tumbledown properties which cost too much to restore. Property prices, which slumped following the recession in the UK, have been slow to recover.

Maggie Kelly of the English-owned estate agency L'Abritannique, based in Hesdin, reports increased interest from British buyers: "With return ferry crossings from only £17, an improved exchange rate and low property prices, the Pas de Calais is

enjoying a revival. These days, however, buyers are reluctant to take on ruins, preferring something ready to move into," she says.

On the books of L'Abritannique, near Montreuil-sur-Mer, is a detached 19th-century house in pristine condition, with three bedrooms, large restored barn and a garden, a 45-minute drive from the Channel Tunnel terminus, on offer at £70,000. There is also a renovated two-up-two-down character cottage at £30,000.

Prices in the Pays d'Auge region in classic Normandy countryside beyond Rouen and south of Lisieux to Alençon have fallen 25 per cent since 1990, says Vivienne Bridge of North and West France Properties.

A traditional half-timbered farmhouse in good condition, with four bedrooms and an acre of land, will set you back about £110,000. About £250,000 buys a small château with up to five acres.

Prices drop south and west in the Orne region of lower Normandy, about a 90-minute drive from the ferry port of Caen (Ouistreham), where you can still find a habitable two-bedroom village house with a garden for £25,000, or a restored three-bedroom farmhouse for £40,000.

It is important to take independent legal advice when buying or selling property in France. Any money in the form of a deposit or sale proceeds should be paid to the notaire in France or, in the case of a sterling transaction, to an English solicitor, in a client account held as stakeholder.

GOING FRENCH

■ British-based solicitors who specialise in French conveyancing: Anthony Wilkin of Thirings & Long, Bath 01225 448494; Stephen Smith of Pretty, Ipswich 01473 232121; Sally Osborne of Russell-Cooke, Poole and Chapman, London 0181-799 9111.

■ Agents: Authentic France, 01288 821372 North and West France Properties, 0171-386 9526; Knight Frank, 0171-429 8171; French Property Shop, 01892 852449; Sifex 0171-384 1200; L'Abritannique, Hesdin, 00 33 321 815 979; Propriétés Roussillon, 0121 459 9058.

Paris by numbers

When buying in the capital make sure you choose the right postcode

With Paris just three hours from London by Eurostar, more British buyers are taking advantage of the strong pound to buy or rent a pied-à-terre in the French capital, where architectural gems can be found around every corner, and the Parisians cluster together in huge apartment blocks of varying elegance and dilapidation. Because the majority of homes in Paris are privately rented, investors in particular are keen to seek out properties to buy and subsequently rent out.

Although the property market in Paris has been in decline for the past six years, with prices having slumped 30 per cent, as elsewhere in France, Leonard Weil, a Parisian buying agent for Hamptons in the UK, reports that the market is picking up.

Naturally the price of a flat depends on its location, size and condition. Prices are worked out according to the number of square metres and the price per square metre for the area, ranging from about £15,000 (£1,670) per square metre to £40,000 (£4,460) for a top-notch flat.

Annual rental values for a good quality flat range between £1,000 (£110) per square metre and £1,200 (£135) per square metre. Hence a small two-bedroom flat in a restored period building in the centre of Paris will cost around £8,000 (£890) a month for 100 square metres, while a studio

suitable for a pied-à-terre will range from £4,000 (£445) a month for 30 square metres.

Descriptions of French properties specify the number of rooms in the living area, rather than indicating how many bedrooms, so a two-bedroom apartment with a reception room will be referred to as trois pièces, plus kitchen and bathroom.

Paris is divided into 20 arrondissements, each with more of a distinctive flavour than a London postcode. Parisians tend to refer to a flat in the 6th or 7th (the Left Bank, near the Eiffel Tower), or the 8th (the Right Bank near the Champs Elysées) with no other explanation necessary.

The 16th, on the Right Bank, in the west of the city near the Bois de Boulogne, is a fashionable area, with its wide tree-lined avenues of 19th-century belle époque buildings.

A two-bedroom flat — trois pièces — plus kitchen and bath in an imposing hôtel particulier (town house) in the Avenue Foch, built in grand style, with high-ceilinged rooms and French windows, will cost at least £300,000.

Le Bastille, the up-and-coming 11th arrondissement on the Right Bank, is the Parisian equivalent of Islington, where you can pick up an apartment in an old character building from £150,000 for 70 square metres. Similarly, Le Marais, an old aristocratic quarter of the 3rd and 4th, is enjoying a renaissance. Its renovated 17th



Town house near the Trocadero, Paris on sale at £2.5 million

and 18th-century mansions are being converted into trendy apartments for artists and media folk, who pay anything from £180,000 for a two-bedroom flat.

On the Left Bank, a flat in the centre of town, in the 5th, 6th and 7th, is the most expensive option, costing between £300,000 and £500,000 for two bedrooms.

The cheapest areas of central Paris, to the north and east, are traditionally those with a large immigrant population. A small flat on the top floor of an old block without a lift, in less salubrious Pigalle in the 18th will cost at least £80,000 for anything that is habitable.

Most Parisians want to live at second-floor level for a better view, more light and less noise, ideally, entre cour

et jardin — overlooking a courtyard and a garden. You might get a better deal on a ground-floor flat or at the top of building without a lift.

As far as condition goes, elegant staircases, marble fireplaces and ornate ceilings are all very fine, but bathroom-sized bedrooms can cost a fortune to heat, and French plumbing and wiring can leave a lot to be desired. To avoid the massive rush-hour traffic jams, make sure there is a Metro station nearby.

The leasehold system does not exist in France, where all property, including flats, are owned freehold. Flat owners are jointly responsible for the common parts of the building and decisions about maintenance and repairs are taken collectively by the residents. If you are planning to buy a flat it is important to check your share of these maintenance costs before you sign the

compromis de vente (sale contract). Paris-based agents Phillip and Patricia Hawkes operate at the top end of the market — properties worth more than £300,000. Leonard Weil, who operates a buyer's service for Hamptons clients spending more than £160,000, will search for the Parisian property of your dreams, and negotiate on your behalf. His fees are included in the asking price. Buyers pay 9 per cent of the purchase price for notary fees and taxes.

Houses with gardens are rare in the city centre and change hands for fortunes — at least £2 million. Those who wish to own a home of their own, with a garden, usually move out to the leafy suburbs around Neuilly, Maisons La fite and Versailles, where property prices are more reasonable. Something old and interesting in such sought-after areas will still be about 15 to 20 per cent less than central Paris.

About 13 miles south of Paris, a 17th-century pavillon with a contemporary outbuilding, orangery and guardian lodge, in 12 acres of walled formal gardens, is on offer at £333,000. It comes with nine bedrooms, five bathrooms, period panelling, original fireplaces and a wine cellar. A hypermarket next door is a drawback, Ms Hawkes says, but it is a lot of house for the money.

There are many small firms of estate agents in Paris but, because most owners who wish to sell advertise the property themselves, prospective buyers should study the small ads in the French daily newspaper *Figaro* and specialist magazines, such as *Particuliers*.

C.T.

■ Hamptons, 0171-824 8822; Phillip and Patricia Hawkes 00 33 142 681 111; Leonard Weil 00 33 140 581 135.

Renovation the French way

RENOVATING a house is a gruelling business, but renovating a house in a foreign language is even harder. It is one thing to realise that the builders have put the lavatory where the washing machine is supposed to be, but quite another to explain the problem in a language that you stopped learning when you were 15.

A few years ago, we fell in love with a three-bedroom wreck in Burgundy. It had not been lived in for a few years, and it needed a complete renovation. Undeterred, we bought it within a week. What followed was not so much a catalogue of disasters, but a series of mishaps that will be of great benefit to those treading the same path.

Our first mistake was to employ an English plumber, whose wife had introduced us to the house. I first visited the house a year after we had bought it, and I was presented with water gushing from pipe joints, a gaping hole where a sink had been casually ripped out, and the bathrooms were more basic than those used by a desert tribe. The plumber had returned to Britain, so there was little we could do. The electricians which were installed by a friend of the plumber, felt — almost literally — ropey.

With a van load of furniture arriving in three weeks, we turned to the locals. They were extremely helpful. The previous owner gave us a pamphlet that listed all the local tradesmen. After seeking various quotes, we employed the local builders (Entreprise Générale de Bâtiment) who called on specialists needed to plaster, tile, shore up, rewire and replumb.

The co-operation between the tradesmen was unlike anything I had witnessed in Britain. At the beginning, they all met in the

house for a "council of war", which I would thoroughly recommend. We discussed each room in great detail and, after plans had been finalised, the work went smoothly.

The problem was language. Before every meeting, I would rehearse. Conversation classes are one thing, but the French words for "reinforced steel joists" and "thump spoke" are not normally bandied. The catalogues issued by two large French DIY chains — OBI and Castorama — were invaluable. These, with a lexicon of building terms found in the *Continental Bookshop* in London, got me through.

Although the work has not yet been finished, we can now enjoy our house. The work carried out has been excellent and the prices fair. Most British have the suspicion that French builders are even more on the make than their equivalents back home, but this was not the case for us.

TO THOSE intending to undertake a similar renovation, I would also recommend opening a bank account as soon as possible. French tradesmen do not wish to be paid in traveller's cheques or a fist full of £50 notes. A French bank account is also useful for establishing direct debits (*les prélèvements automatiques*) to pay the bills of the utility companies.

Incidentally, paying for electricity is different in France. There, you nominate the number of kilowatts you wish to use (*puissance mise à votre disposition*) and you are levied on that amount. There are also special tariffs, which are useful for those who only use the house in summer.

KERRY BROOKER

Checklist of useful builder's vocabulary

ENGLISH	FRENCH	ENGLISH	FRENCH
estimate	le devis	main sewerage	le tout-à-l'égout
wiring system	l'électricité	attic conversion	l'aménagement du grenier
central heating	le chauffage central	carpenter	le menuisier
(electrical) socket	la prise	builder's merchant	le marchand de matériaux
water supply	l'alimentation en eau	partition wall	la cloison
plumbing	la plomberie	builder	le maçon
drainage	l'évacuation des eaux usées	roof check and repairs	l'entretien et les réparations du toit
septic tank	la fosse septique		



The colonial-style front of Whitton Place, complete with flagpole and Union Jack, plus a four-car garage

In the hall of the gizmo king

Cranky but comfortable or terrifyingly tacky? The answer is in the eye of the buyer

Driving to Whitton Place on a blustery night, as Owl in *Winnie The Pooh* might have said, the air rich and moist with a Brighton sea fret that had somehow managed to sneak over the border into Hove. I couldn't make up my mind whether the house was weird or wonderful.

I had studied the estate agent's brochure and done my homework. I knew they wanted £1 million to £1.5 million for what, to my mind at any rate, looked like a jumped-up house in the suburbs, albeit with koi carp and cupolas. Even so, I was pretty certain of the tack I was going to take: the tacky tack. And my first glimpse of the place didn't do anything to change my mind. With its flagpole, Union Jack snapping like washing on a clothes line, Corinthian columns and topiary like a standard poodle's bottom flanking the front door, the house looked like somebody's idea of a bizarre joke (what do you get when you cross the White House with a Barrat Home).

Crunching up the gravel, I had the feeling I was being watched. At first I suspected it was King Trident, whose lifelike sculpture dangled from the front wall flanked



The 50ft pool has its own bar and changing room with saunas. The drawing room, right, has casements opening on to the koi pool

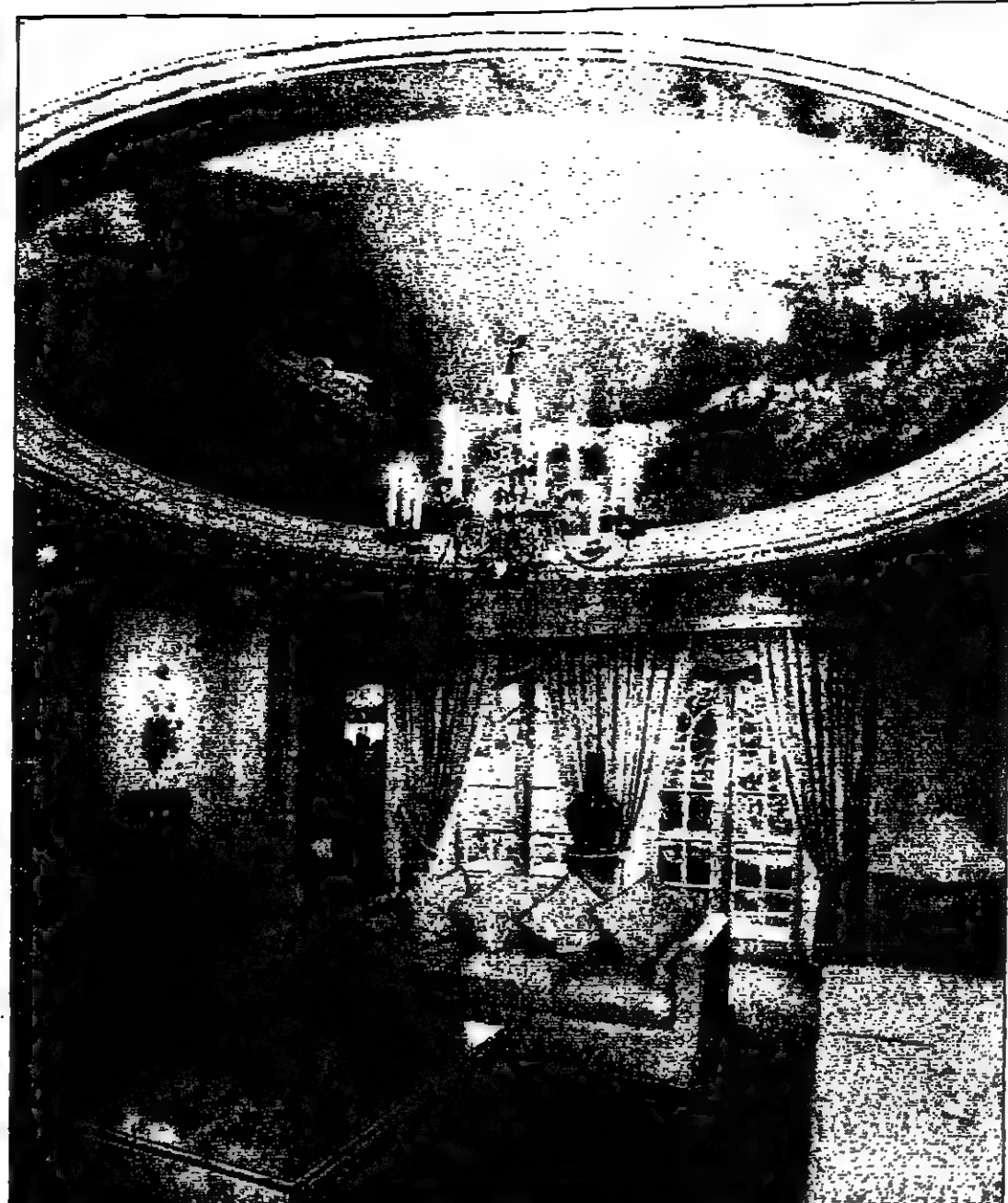
by two giant clams holding hardy annuals. Then I realised it was the security cameras, zooming in on my every move, which were making my neck hairs stand on end. Derek Edmonds, the retired owner in his late forties, is known in the area for having been a jeweller and pawnbroker in Brighton. He showed me around the house which has been his home for nearly 18 years and seemed almost as keenly aware of the strange character of the place.

Standing in the middle of his smoked salmon-pink master bedroom, he demonstrated how, at the push of a button, a jet of water shoots out of the bottom of the chandelier on to whoever happens to be loitering in the enormous round tub below. "I was telling someone about this and as I was doing so I

realised it sounded terrible. Terrible! But it's not, really."

And, he is right. Because although Whitton Place is hardly a shrine to good taste, it is indeed what Mr Edmonds insists it is: a house for living in. A house that is fun. A house for those who crave creature comforts, and lots of them.

There are gadgets and gizmos everywhere. In the peach bedroom, for instance, you can lie on the bed and use a sort of Mission Control panel to do everything from summon tea (delivered by the gentleman's gentleman, George) to draw the curtains or run the bath. "The water has been pre-set to come out at just the right temperature, the plug goes down automatically, and when the bath gets to the desired level, the water turns itself off." When the water does come out, it



spews from the beaks of swan-head taps. Does he ever, I wonder, forget which control button to push and wind up running the bath when he really means to open the safe? Or summon George when he really only fancies a bit of Eastenders? And there's more. Go through the enormous en suite dressing room, the clothes folded immaculately in stacks which, one suspects, bear the loving mark of George, and at the end, hidden away behind what looks like just another wall, is a sauna. "Just a little one, of course. There's a bigger one downstairs."

At the other end of the suite is the fitness room. "If I used this thing every day, I'd lose 20lb," Mr Edmonds says of a white-padded contraption which, at the touch of yet another button, starts thrashing about wildly.

Downstairs, in the living room, the centre of the floor revolves. "That was from my crazy younger days," Mr Edmonds admits. "We had a round sofa and you could sit on it and spin around so you could have a cuddle by the fire, spin around so you could have a view of the garden; just spin around for the hell of it if you liked." While spinning you could gaze up into the Carolina-blue cupola, with its fluffy white clouds.

One of the peculiarities, structurally, of the house is its three staircases. "The previous owner had a thing about *Fiddler on the Roof* and the song about a house with three stairways," Mr Edmonds says. The main staircase is wide, and sweeping down it I feel

rather like a malnourished Mae West making an entrance.

The grounds, like the house, hide myriad secrets, tasteful and otherwise. There are little benches, a metalwork elephant, statues of mysterious-looking Chinese men, a hard tennis court ("Don't forget to mention the tennis court", and a cherry tree where, in summer, at precisely 7pm, a flock of red and green parrots comes to visit. "Don't ask me where they come from."

Alongside the house is an enormous koi pool, filled with carp the size of groupers. "We had a koi cull recently; we had to fish out about 500 of the smaller ones and give them to friends."



Selling up: Derek Edmonds

HOUSE OF THE WEEK

Whitton Place, Tongdean Road, Hove, East Sussex. • Price: £1 million to £1.5 million • Shopping: Cullers, for snackables, is just two minutes away. Downtown Brighton with its chic lanes and the weird and wonderful North Laine area, is a further five-minute drive. • Schools: Roedean and Lancing College are within easy reach. • Travel: Preston Park railway station (trains to Victoria or London Bridge) is a ten-minute walk. Gatwick airport is a 30-minute drive. • Entertainment: Racing at Brighton, Plumpton or Glorious Goodwood. The Theatre Royal in Brighton. County cricket at Hove. Football at Brighton and Hove Albion's Goldstone Ground, but not for long. Selling from Brighton Marina



Water spews forth from swan-head taps in the bathroom

Mr Edmonds says, gesturing to the rocks. There are more surprises: a 50ft heated swimming pool shaped rather like a kidney bean; a pair of palms, even better than the ones at his house in Spain; a conservatory where, on reckless summer evenings, one can summon the bartender to dish up the Martinis while above, in the gallery, the gentlemen play cards.

All of this five minutes from the centre of Brighton, 20 minutes from Garwick, an hour from London. So why is he leaving this utopia with topiary? "It's just too big. I suddenly felt it was obscene really, two people living in such an enormous house. But I shall miss it."

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A taste of Devon Hams

The downshifters have set their sights on a corner of the South West.

Christine Webb finds out why

After the Easter holiday, when the golden promise of summer beckons, a city dweller's fancy can turn to an idyllic retreat. Now one area of Devon is proving to be a magnet for downshifters, those wanting to escape to a simpler, healthier life.

According to the Economic and Social Research Council, 90,000 town dwellers a year are heading for the country, which suggests that these dreams may be becoming reality. In the South Hams area of Devon the trend is so marked that agents say property prices are returning to the heady heights of the late 1980s.

In Salcombe, for example, a terraced cottage on Custom House Quay, with one reception room, two bedrooms, a third in the loft space, and a running morning, is for sale at £175,000 through Fulford's Salcombe office, which also offers a modern detached

three-bedroom house with estuary views at £225,000.

There was a sea change in market conditions in 1996, says Philip Marchand, of Marchand Pettit of Kingsbridge. "Last year, 64 per cent of our sales went to people from outside the area, mostly from cities in the South East and the Midlands. Such people are fed up with city life and the lifestyle here is more relaxed, so they work from home or live in properties that have income potential, such as farmhouses with barns converted into holiday cottages."

So why is this triangular area south of the A38, east of Plymouth and west of Torbay so appealing? For a start, it is at the limit of an easy trip from London by train or car.

The area is also exceptionally beautiful, says Colette Charsley-White of Knight Frank's Exeter office. "It's rural, but not too rural. You are never far from Plymouth



Dennis and Jill Norman left city life for the good life of running holiday flats and a tearoom at South Hallsands, Devon

or Exeter. Tones is a lovely Elizabethan market town full of artists, potters and weavers, and Dartmouth has some artists and writers.

"When someone dreams of living in Devon, you can bet that's the area they picture. Some people commute weekly to Bristol, Birmingham or London, returning at weekends, while their children grow up by the sea."

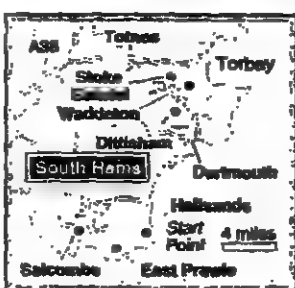
The investment market is strong, too, with holiday lets giving a good return.

Mrs Charsley-White deals with cottage complexes, and says: "About 75 per cent of our inquiries are from outside the area, 60 per cent from the Home Counties."

On her books is a complex of seven holiday cottages converted from a group of listed barns at Waddeton Home Farm, six miles from Tones, with a thatched cottage nearby to provide the owners' ideal accommodation. The price of the package is £550,000.

Knight Frank and Marchand Pettit are marketing Maelcombe House at East Prawle, which has magnificent sea views and, with its ten bedrooms and 25 acres, the potential for use as a guest house. It is for sale at £680,000.

Dennis Norman, aged 45, and his wife, Jill, 44, took the plunge last October, paying



£430,000 for a large house. Trouts, in a spectacular position at South Hallsands, near Start Point. The house is converted into eight holiday flats, with recreational facilities, a tearoom and gardens.

Mr Norman, who formerly lived in Woking, Surrey, and worked in the City, thinks the house was a bargain. But he and his wife have yet to discover how they will cope with their first season.

"We geared up for Easter, when we were fully booked," Mr Norman says. "In high season our smallest two-bedroom flat lets for £380 a week, our largest, which sleeps eight, goes for £770. It will be hard work."

But now, instead of catching the 8.15am to Waterloo, I'm here with my tray of fresh crab sandwiches."

Lynn and Richard Micklewright, both 48, have recently bought Knowle Farm, a 17th-century farmhouse with three

holiday cottages at Rattery, near Tones, for £550,000.

"My husband worked in the City for 30 years, and has always said that was not the way to live," Mrs Micklewright says. "When Richard got the chance to leave the City we decided we'd do something different. We see it as a change of direction, a new challenge."

It's a long way from the Home Counties and it may seem like being on holiday initially but we'll have a lot to do, because we're booked for the whole of July and August. For us it's in the deep end."

The market for second homes in the area is rising, too. Martin Lamb, of Knight Frank, says: "In 1989, second homes were the first thing people got rid of, but now they are coming back. We've just sold a Regency rectory in three acres with water frontage at East Portlemouth, near Salcombe, for £550,000."

"The sailing in these areas is an enormous pull and a view or access to water adds a premium of 20 to 40 per cent. The most valuable areas are Dittisham, Stoke Gabriel and Waddeton, on the Dart, where big houses with water frontage sell for £2 million. Salcombe comes next."

Michael Weller, a Salcombe agent who is selling a two-bedroom flat at £199,000, says: "It's a pretty town, a very middle-class holiday area, and popular with sailors. Holiday lets can't satisfy demand in July and August, when the town's population swells from 2,000 to about 20,000."

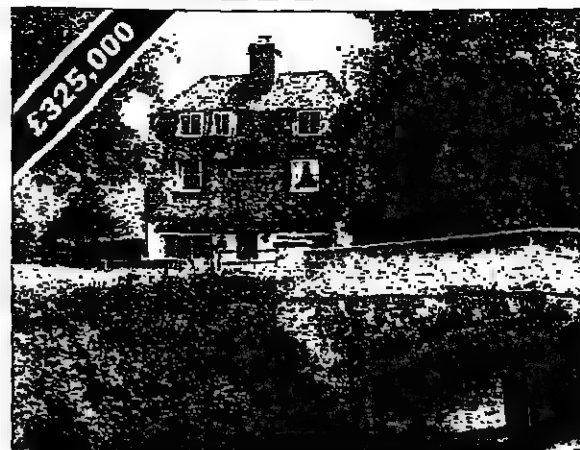
Inland, too, business is brisk. Philip Hughes, of Hands Hughes, Tones, says so much property has changed hands in the last year that there's now a dearth. "There are more people looking for holiday homes here and there's more disposable income around, which we had not seen until six months ago when the market took off. People want second homes as investments. Period character properties have got back to the level they were at their peak."

"But this area has always been relatively expensive. I've just sold a 1960s four-bedroom village house in one acre that needed £30,000 spent on it for £192,500. People often come house-hunting and realise they can't afford it. Prices are especially rising in the £200,000 to £400,000 range."

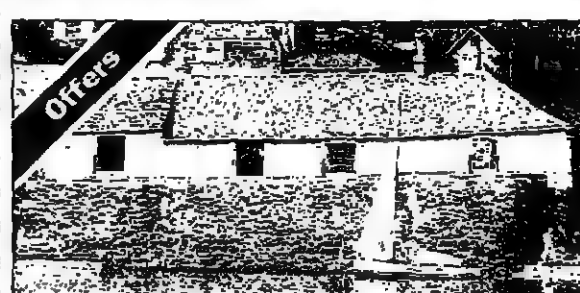
Marchand Pettit, Kingsbridge, Devon, 01548 857588; Knight Frank, Exeter, 01392 423111; Fulfords, Salcombe, 01548 843731; Michael Weller, Salcombe, 01548 843346; Hands Hughes, Tones, 01893 863811.

FOR SALE

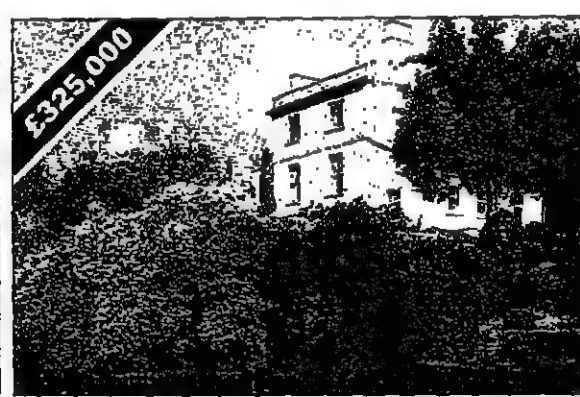
ON THE WATERFRONT



KENT The Bridge House, Parnhurst. Renovated 17th-century timber-framed house on the edge of an historic village, with a garden fronting the river Medway. Four bedrooms, two bathrooms, drawing room, dining room, kitchen/breakfast room, office, utility. Coach house/garage, stable and boat house. About £325,000 (John D. Wood, 01342 326329).



CORNWALL The Square, St Mawes. Detached single-story Grade II listed building, fronting St Mawes Harbour and overlooking St Anthony Head and Penderis Point. Three bedrooms (all en suite), two reception rooms, two kitchens and garage. Lower store/drying room/storage for sailing equipment. Offers invited (Miller & Son, 01579 344451).



BATH 21 Sydney Buildings, Bathwick Hill. Early 18th-century, semi-detached house with fine views over Bath and canal frontage. Five bedrooms, two bathrooms, dressing room, sitting room, dining room, kitchen/breakfast room, hall and cloakroom. Cellars and gardens. About £225,000 (Saville, 01225 446822).

CHERYL TAYLOR

PROPERTY NEWS

■ **IVY HOUSE FARM**, near Diss, Norfolk, once home to Roger Bacon, an ancestor of Sir Francis Bacon, is for sale at £240,000. *Amanda Loose writes.* The original deeds to the six-bedroom Grade II listed farmhouse, with parts dating from 1480, are held by the Bacon Foundation in Chicago. Details from Savills, 01603 612211.

■ **MOST AMERICANS** in London choose to rent a house in Chelsea, while tenants in Wapping and the Isle of Dogs remain resolutely British, according to a survey from Knight Frank. More than 40 per cent of tenants in Chelsea are Americans; the Brits 18 per cent.

■ **A GRADE II*** listed converted Norman church at Little Oakley, near Harwich, Essex, the setting for Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*, is for sale at about £225,000. Dating from the 12th century, the church was converted in the 1980s but retains many features, including its Gothic archways. Details from Strutt & Parker, 01473 214841.

SHOPAROUND

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AUTHENTIC TESTIMONIALS
For eight years, the Health Bracelet has been sold with long-lasting success. Here are many testimonials (full names and addresses are registered in our archives as legal evidence) which confirm the extraordinary effectiveness of magnetotherapy. (The Health Bracelet is effective for 5 to 7 years)

I was suffering from pain in the back and discomfort of the spine. Also I had a terrible pain in my shoulder due to an accident. Well, ever since I've been wearing the Health Bracelet I haven't had any back or shoulder pain. I also suffered from insomnia and stomach aches due to the stress and the pain. Now I sleep very well and no longer have stomach aches. The Health Bracelet works really fast, after having worn it for only two months, I felt an improvement. I've been wearing it for five years now and feel very good. Thank you, R.D.

I've always worked hard on my back, over the years, I'd developed so much tension in my arms and shoulders that I couldn't sleep because of the pain. I also started having problems getting dressed and functioning normally. After seeing an ad about the Health Bracelet, I decided to order one. I had it delivered to my home in a week. I was amazed at how the bracelet worked. I don't have any more back pain, I don't have any more stomach aches, I don't have any more insomnia, I don't have any more stress, I don't have any more pain. I've been wearing the bracelet for over five years, and I haven't had any problems. C.B.

I've been wearing the Health Bracelet for four years now, and still can't get over how many changes have occurred. The pain I had from the rheumatism in my legs and feet also disappeared. I was so satisfied with the Health Bracelet that I encouraged a friend who was suffering from severe rheumatism to buy it. She told me the Health Bracelet relieved much of her pain. I will always be grateful to you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. G.L.

I was doubtful at first, but then I told myself I would try it. I had surgery for lower back pain fifteen years ago during which I used through a great deal of suffering. Thanks to the Health Bracelet, I am no longer in pain. It's wonderful. I recommend it to everyone. One of my friends also bought one and is very satisfied with it. Thank you, Y.L.

My knees were swollen and I could barely walk. I saw an ad about how effective the Health Bracelet was, so I ordered one. After some time, to my great surprise, both the pain and the swelling disappeared. My circulation also improved. I couldn't do without my Health Bracelet anymore. I strongly recommend it. H.T.

My bones and my circulation were bad because I couldn't exercise due to illness. I am now 58 years old. I've had three Health Bracelets so far. I am very proud of it and I strongly recommend the bracelet to everyone. That only does it makes me feel better, but it also looks nice. H.T.

In 1970, I broke a shoulder in a car accident. All that doctors could do was pain my shoulder. I couldn't work with that arm anymore. I was in so much pain. For the past 7 years, I've been wearing the Health Bracelet and working with less pain. I never take the Health Bracelet off. I recommend it to all my friends. R.L.M.

I felt pain in my legs, my hands and feet numb. For the past year, I've been wearing the Health Bracelet and I can honestly feel a difference; the numbness is gone and my circulation is better. In the beginning, I really didn't think it could work. But now I recommend it to all my friends. T.F.

I've been wearing the Health Bracelet for two years and I am completely satisfied with it. It relieves my pain considerably. I could no longer go on without my Health Bracelet. R.L.



I was suffering from rheumatism in my neck. My wife had a terrible pain in her arms due to an accident. We ordered two Health Bracelets, and much to our surprise, our pain went away. I no longer take the pain relievers or sleeping pills because the pain has disappeared and I can sleep normally again. I also digest better and don't have intestinal problems anymore. My wife, Mary, is no longer suffering and is very happy. We have both worn our bracelets for several years and recommend it to everyone. Mr and Mrs G.

When I started wearing the Health Bracelet, my headaches went away. I also noticed a change in my rheumatism pain, and I am not as tired anymore. My whole attitude has changed as a result. I had a couple of friends who had the plain truth is they were completely astonished. I believe in the Health Bracelet and I encourage people to get one. R.M.

I admit I didn't believe the Health Bracelet could work. I felt terrible pain in my back and legs. I ordered the bracelet. I'd been wearing it for one week when I started feeling the pain go away. After one month, the pain was completely gone. I recommended the bracelet to several of my friends; they were all pleased with its effects. What's more, your company is honest and very reliable. A.P.

I had consulted four doctors for no inflammation of the joints, yet the pain persisted to the point that I could no longer sleep. With your Health Bracelet, I am in heaven because I now sleep throughout the entire night. Thanks to your Health Bracelet I am no longer in pain and I can now work normally. Thank you, R.L.

My friend and I have been suffering from stiff and painful joints for a long time. To our great surprise, after using the Health Bracelet for only two weeks, there was an unbelievable difference. I truly recommend this wonderful Health Bracelet to everyone. T.C.

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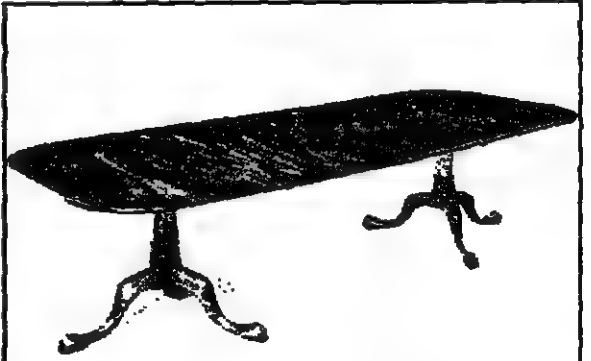
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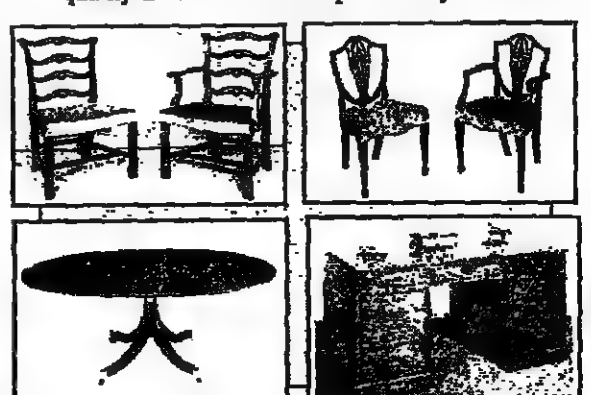
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Tom and Barbara Good of the classic television series *The Good Life* had a pleasant detached house with a neat garden, and Tom left for work every morning wearing a suit. But a few months into self-sufficiency, their cheeks were tanned, their figures trim, the garden resembled the *Somme*, and the kitchen was piled high with rotting vegetables.

Of course, the Goods weren't really coming at self-sufficiency from the right angle, as Evelyn Green is quick to point out. Mrs Green is chairman of the Meon Valley Self Sufficiency Group, Hampshire, and she is sick of comparisons with the inept *Surbiton* couple.

"There is more to self-sufficiency than sowing a few packets of seeds in the back garden," she says. Instead, her group's members aim to provide for as many as their food and energy needs as possible, while preserving the old-fashioned aspects of country and village life.

Not surprisingly with BSE and healthy eating in the public mind, a MORI poll this week confirmed that 60 per cent of us would prefer to eat organic food if it were more readily available in supermarkets. Organic product sales are up by a third on last year.

Mrs Green says: "People think we're all a bit loopy but we're just normal, hard-working people who are trying to promote a particular way of life. Our members are aged from their thirties to their eighties, and most have full-time jobs — there are doctors, solicitors, builders and nurses. But we work together, share our skills and promote the best things about country life."

The Meon Valley group was started in

1982 by Joy Pratt, who had been practising her own form of self-sufficiency for 15 years. She put up posters advertising the new group's first meeting and 35 people turned up. The group now has more than 100 members.

Mrs Green admits that, living in the depths of the countryside in the Nineties, it is impossible to be entirely self-sufficient. Electricity and a telephone are essential, as is some form of powered transport. However, the members of this localised collective promote self-sufficiency to varying degrees. Many keep small animals and the group arranges a monthly bulk order for feed.

In recent years the group's annual turnover has been around £35,000, putting it on the same footing as some local full-time farmers. Some members spin their own wool and produce leather goods, and all aim to be self-sufficient in basic vegetables and fruit, although they are at the mercy of the weather and sometimes limited by the type of soil on their land.

However, this is where the group comes into its own: "If you're trying to grow things organically, and not use pesticides, you might lose seedlings because pigeons get them or slugs find a way in," Mrs Green says. "But even if I lose all my lettuce like that, someone down the road might have a couple to spare, which I can exchange for something else."

Members sell surplus stock at group

A self-sufficiency group of ordinary working people is in rude health, Sarah Edghill reports



Members of the Meon self-sufficiency group with Ella the pig

meetings, and exchange goods and services. At any time the monthly newsletter might offer for sale or exchange anything from muscovy ducklings to fleeces for spinning or goat's milk as well as printing recipes for old-fashioned lemonade and rose petal wine. "It works so well that you don't know it's going on," Mrs Green says. "Then

someone mentions that they had a leaking pipe and another member came out and fixed it in exchange for 5lb of honey."

As well as working her land, Mrs Green and her husband need a constant supply of wood for the range that heats their house and for cooking. "This time of year is also one of the busiest because so

much preparation needs to be done. Animals are expecting their young and we are planting seeds for the crops we hope will come up later in the year."

Kate and Andrew Goldsmith and their three small children live in Denmead, a village which has grown to the size of a small town. "We are right in the centre by the shops so the bottom of our garden is virtually in the car park, but we manage to do a lot with a small amount of space. About three-quarters of the garden is down to vegetables, and I also keep chickens and rabbits."

"If we need advice on any aspect of self-sufficiency there is always someone around happy to help."

Such work is extremely hard work. "Every night during the summer there is something that needs picking or freezing or turning into chutney," Mrs Goldsmith says. "Even small animals like ours take an hour a day to look after."

Zara Bampton started growing her own fruit and vegetables because she was worried by health scares and wanted her family to eat as well as possible. She is now self-sufficient in a wide variety of vegetables, as well as in lamb, beef and poultry. However, with the demands of children aged four and two, she was finding it difficult to devote the necessary time to her land, so now she shares both work and produce with a friend who lives nearby. "Sandra had always want-

ed to learn more about self-sufficiency, but didn't have the confidence to do it on her own," Mrs Bampton says. "We joined up about a year ago, and I have been able to show her how everything works, and she is always on hand to help out if I've got a problem with the children or we want to go on holiday."

The only cloud on the horizon for the entrepreneurs in the Meon Valley is the increase in EC directives. In the early years members dealt with milk surpluses by producing everything from yoghurt and cheese to ice-cream, but increasingly strict hygiene regulations meant many were unable to carry on. "You can no longer sell 'green' milk, as opposed to pasteurised, which precludes some members from sharing homemade produce," Evelyn Green says. "What used to be so easy ten years ago is now riddled with restrictions. It's a similar story with meat."

"If you take your beasts to an abattoir you aren't guaranteed to get your own meat back, because everything is done *à la masse*. Because of that, most members now use home slaughterers; but if an animal is slaughtered at home you aren't allowed to sell the meat, which people used to do to cover some of their costs. Now some people share ownership of a steer, but the European directives have made everything more tricky."

The Meon Valley group won't allow such legalities to restrict their activities, and new members are joining all the time. "Once you've experienced the satisfaction of self-sufficiency, you'll never want to go back to any other way of life," Mrs Green says.

Surbiton never had it so good.

Readers fear country life is threatened by declining numeracy — how will farmers count the moles?

Dilemmas without number

Out of a pile of letters received in the last month — thank you — there is one drawing our attention to yet another great rural tradition that is about to disappear: the rathole of technology. This one is of the mind rather than the hands, but no less important. I shall not reveal it at this stage lest you be too shaken to continue reading, but I stress that it is as vital to the numeracy of the nation as any computer/education election promise.

Let me tell you first about a 1930s booklet I have, called *Farm Reckoning*, which was an aid for those having to do sums in their heads. The only flaw in this booklet is that the laws of nature often take precedence over the principles of mathematics. Anyone who grows anything knows that the answer to "how many beans make five?" depends on whether the crows have anywhere to go for breakfast other than the field where you have sown the bean seed. When this booklet poses questions such as, "A small flock of 14 hens laid 2,730 eggs in a year. What was the average annual yield of each bird?" The correct answer is not necessarily the mathematical one. Something along the lines of "all depends" might be nearer the truth.

But Mr Thompson of Holcombe near Bath, Somerset, draws our attention to a more modern threat to rural numeracy. He writes:

do away, eventually, with a traditional skill? The most innumerate peasant used to be able — without hesitation — to subtract any number from 301 and announce the possible combinations that would lead to a finish as surely as the expert can in TV darts competitions.

He is, of course, right. Learning to do such calculations was the first step along a bumpy road which eventually leads to a full understanding of the average yield of a small flock of hens. A campaign to eradicate the electronic scoreboard might, therefore, be time well spent. But, more broadly, is the preservation of village life a worthy cause? It is widely assumed that it is, but Sir Neil Pritchard, writing from Daglingworth near Cirencester, Gloucestershire, offers an interesting view. He writes:

The earlier raison d'être of villages has, of course, disappeared. But it has not left a vacuum; it has been replaced by "commuter settlements, retirement enclaves" etc. with-



PAUL HEINEY



The traditional rural skill of being able to subtract any number from 301 without hesitation has been undermined

out which the village would have been deserted years ago.

Why should it be assumed that these are evil, nihilistic, giving no new life? I retired to this village 20 years ago: I have been active in many village activities. Is it self-evident that it would have been better for the village if I had been shuffled off to a retirement home elsewhere? Bringing villages "up to date, injecting new life, facilities and work opportunities" sounds a bit like "make-over-village-a-miniature-town". Is this necessarily a good thing? The future of villages requires serious thought, not woolly-minded shibboleths and clichés which do not acquire validity from repetition.

I offer you that letter in the hope of further suggestions on the revitalisation of villages: no clichés allowed.

Finally, we must return to moles: creatures for which I expressed some admiration at their skilful burrowing and their ability to bring to the surface the crumbliest soil from deep within the tough old land. Meg Kingston writes to me of an invention for catching moles alive and thereby ridding oneself of them, but

WRITE TO PAUL HEINEY
Reader's letters are welcome on countryside matters of any kind, from wildlife to village life, from people to politics. Letters are featured on the first Saturday of every month.

Send letters to: Paul Heiney, Weekend, 1 Pennington St, London E1 9XN

allowing the mole his freedom to labour elsewhere. She first of all raises a philosophical point when she notes that we always talk of moles invading "our garden" when it is just as much the mole's garden. Anyway, Mrs Kingston sends me a cutting from her local newspaper which offers a "Live Catch Mole Trap". I rang Nigel Shearing of Long Meadow (the manufacturer) hoping that he had a way of easing my conscience in dealing with the pests. He has. It is a re-invention of a 17th-century trap originally carved of wood. It consists of two tubes with a one-way door at either end. He explained what you do:

Prod the ground with a 4 in rod to find the direction of the mole run. They are usually about 9in deep. With a spade, open up the run and place the trap along it making sure it sits at the bottom of the run and the mole hasn't got to take a step up. There's no need to cover it up.

Here comes the unsavoury bit: When moles are caught, they get so angry that they pee a lot. What you want to do when you catch your first mole is save a bit of that pee-on soil, dry it and save it for future use. Next time you want to catch a mole, place the trap then take a bit of twig and wet the end of it by putting it in your mouth...

please be careful to do this in the right order... then dip it in the dry, pee-impregnated soil. Then drop

the twig in the trap. Moles are aggressive little creatures and if they think another mole has been in their run, they'll charge around and be in the trap before you know where you are. And still alive.

This, of course, raises the question of what to do next. Most towns and villages have recycling sites for newspapers and bottles, but have yet to see a mole bank. Mr Shearing thinks the law allows you to release them anywhere with permission, and due care and attention to the mole's future prospects. An old meadow might be best.

There again, we could turn this into a national debate as to where moles should be sent after being forcibly removed from their homes. Will it necessarily be a better life in a rural environment than it was in those town-like tunnels beneath the vegetable bed? Could a proper consideration of their needs and neighbourhoods lead us to new ideas on our own rural problems of retirement villages, community spirit, unwanted new structures thrown up overnight, and how many moles make five? Let me know.

Long Meadow, 01747 838357.



ON THE SPOT: NORTHUMBERLAND

Rural recommendations
The place: Dunstanburgh Castle, near Embleton. The view: Climb to the top of the gatehouse tower; east, the grey sweep of the North Sea; north, Bamburgh Castle and the Farne Islands; south, the pretty fishing village of Craster. The appeal: What is more romantic than a ruined castle? Northumberland is crowded with castles but this is the best and most isolated.

Afficionados: Turner was a fan: his are the finest and most majestic views of the castle. Seagulls enjoy the high cliffs that serve as the castle's seaward battlement. **Historical interest:** With its walls enclosing 11 acres, it is the largest castle in England. Built in 1313 by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, it was the stronghold of John of Gaunt (1340-99) after his return from the Hundred Years' War; from here he effectively ruled England.

Time of day/time of year to visit: Winter when the howling winds recall the ghosts of vanished knights. I have gone at midnight, too, when the full moon makes the castle spooky and splendid; English Heritage, however, won't let you in at night. **How to get there:** No access by car. Park at Craster and walk 11 miles north along the tops of the dunes, or park at Embleton and walk about the same distance south, first along the desert, white beach, then along the dunes.

OS reference: 260221. **Also nearby:** Fine crab sandwiches to be had in the Jolly Fisherman at Craster. Dunstanburgh Castle Golf Course (clubhouse in Embleton) is a fine links course designed by James Braid and is open to non-members.

ERICA WAGNER

THE TIMES & HATCHARD Gardening forum

with Tim Smit and Penelope Hobhouse

READERS are invited to a forum with two of Britain's leading gardeners, Tim Smit and Penelope Hobhouse, on Tuesday, April 15 at 7.30pm at the Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7. Chaired by Stephen Anderson, *The Times* Gardener, the forum marks the publication of Hobhouse's book, *Garden Designs* (Frances Lincoln, £25) and Smit's *The Last Gardens of Heligan* (Victor Gollancz, £20). Questions will be invited.

Hobhouse, a designer, plantswoman and colourist, will reveal how she has created a range of successful gardens, from a courtyard garden in Paris to one on a windswept Scottish island. Smit, a former archaeologist, record producer and composer, will tell of his discovery and re-creation of the magnificent Victorian gardens at Heligan in Cornwall. Tickets at £10 (concessions for OAPs, students and the unemployed, with ID, £7.50) include £2 off both books, are available by phoning 0171-734 1483, by faxing the coupon below to 0171-494 1313 or 0171-287 2638, by e-mail on 187pic@hatchards.co.uk or by sending the coupon with your remittance to Hatchards, 187 Piccadilly, London W1V 0LE. Tickets are also available to personal callers at Hatchards.

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The American blown ashore

ON EASTER Sunday I saw a rare bird in a somewhat unlikely place. The bird was a pied-billed grebe, and the place was South Norwood Lake in London, just south of Crystal Palace.

I knew the bird was there, and I walked from Crystal Palace station through leafy streets to this public pond, which is in a small park. People were sitting about eating ice-creams, and robins and even a chiffchaff were singing in the flowering prunus trees. At the lakeside I turned my field-glasses hopefully on to several coots and mallards before I saw what I was looking for — a dumpy brown bird floating on the water, with little to remark on except its wedge-shaped white beak with a black stripe down it.

Still, there it was — a pied-billed grebe. If I had been on the other side of the Atlantic I would hardly have looked at it, because it is found throughout the Americas. Here, though, only a few have been recorded, all of them birds which have been blown across the ocean. It was first seen in December, when a local birdwatcher saw it emerge from the mist over the lake. It must have been the shock of his life when he realised this dingy ball of feathers was not a little grebe but a rare transatlantic vagrant.

FEATHER REPORT



Expert angler: the pied-billed grebe

Now it floated behind a small island, and further round the lake I found a group of twitchers watching it, some of whom had already "ticked" a little crane in Kent earlier in the day, and were a bit blasé about a pied-billed grebe. However, it was to give us a wonderful show. It was evidently quite at home on the lake. It was as indifferent to human beings as it was to the Canada geese who were creating a racket all around it, honking and rearing up and splashing

their heads into the water as they courted. After a while it started diving. Now it came close in to the shore and we could see all its distinctive features easily — its tuft white tail (quite unlike the straight stern of the little grebe, which is like a loaf of bread with a slice cut off), its black forehead, the bright white ring round its eye, and its curious beak.

On about its sixth dive, it caught a fish almost half as long as itself, and swallowed it headfirst. With meals as easily obtainable as that, it was not surprising that it had taken up residence here. However, it is not likely ever to get a mate. The male and female birds are similar, so it is not known which sex this one is, but either way another pied-billed grebe is hardly likely to turn up in South Norwood. This pied-billed grebe may have found a comfortable home after its adventures — but its life is likely to be a lonely one from now on.

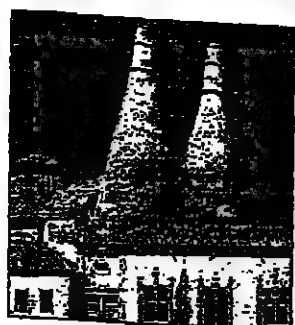
DERWENT MAY

What's about: Birders — look out for swallows over water. Twitchers — a surf scoter at Titchwell, Norfolk; a blue-winged teal at Bowling Green Marsh, Devon; a rough-legged buzzard at Dunlop Valley, Lancashire. Details from Birdline 0800 700222. Calls cost 50p a minute, cheap rate, 50p at all other times.

Music for

ELITE FACT FILE

...and more...



On the trail of Byron in Sintra
Portugal · 20

THE TIMES travel

Seafood and walks on the menu
Norfolk · 23



Music for Meissen men – and women

A cruise down the river Elbe reveals a newly restored eastern Europe



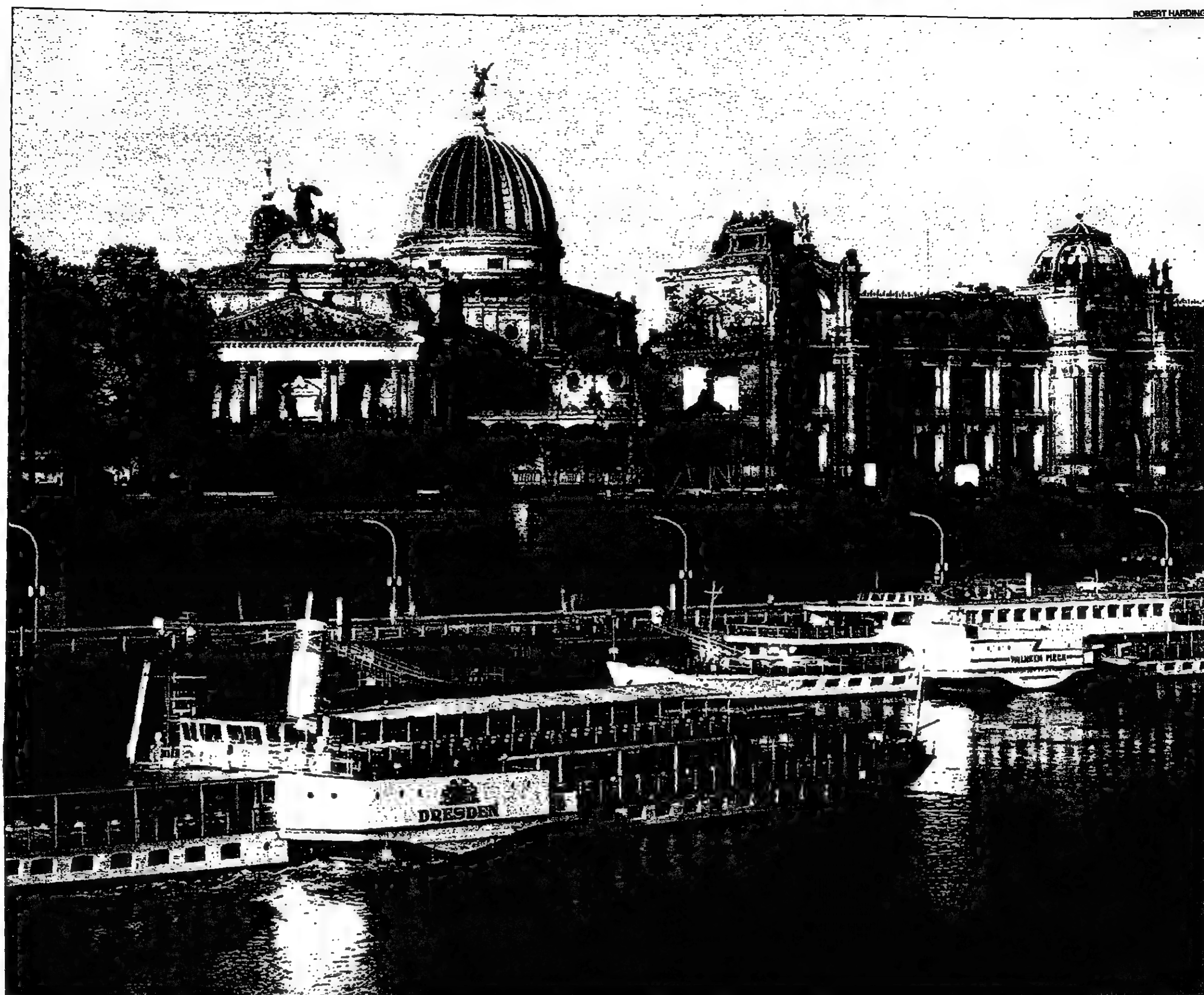
Zwinger Palace, Dresden

One of the most pleasing sounds to be heard in eastern Germany is the church organ. In the course of three days I visited a church in Torgau where an organist was practising, attended morning service in Wittenberg and an organ concert in Meissen Cathedral. As if in continuing celebration of the end of communism, the people of Meissen gather every day at noon, for about 20 minutes, to listen to the cathedral organ. Organ recitals are also frequently held in the Roman Catholic cathedral in Dresden.

The student of geography will know what else these towns have in common: they are all on the banks of the river Elbe. I was on a seven-day cruise on the *MS Dresden*, downstream as far as Magdeburg, then upstream from Dresden through the mountainous region of "Saxon Switzerland" and into the Czech Republic. We were well looked after and well fed, and if the passing landscape was on occasion uninspiring, there were always herons and storks along the riverbank.

Our first stop was Wittenberg, where almost every historic building commemorates Martin Luther. Catholic visitors to the Lutherhalle may feel overwhelmed by the number of pictures and manuscripts in celebration of his life; but the Renaissance-tiled oven which the great man apparently used is an impressive sight. Next door, the curious finger-gabled house occupied by Luther's contemporary, Philip Melanchthon, is now overhung by cranes.

The building work in this part of Germany is another testament to its emergence from the dark night of communism. It is not only new buildings that are going up in every town, but churches and historic monuments that are being restored. Most notably, the great domed Frauenkirche in Dresden, destroyed by bombing in 1945, is being rebuilt at a cost of some £70 million and over a period of ten years. In Magdeburg, which was another victim of Allied "area bombing" at the end of the war, the ruined St Johanniskirche is also to be



Dresden from the Elbe. The city used to be known as "Baroque Florence" and, although it was very heavily bombed during the war, it has been restored to something approaching its former glory

restored, as a museum, though many wanted it left as a war memorial.

On either side of its bomb-scarred twin towers the soulless monuments to Stalinism – flat-roofed office and apartment blocks – are grotesque. Magdeburg used to be known as the greyest of the grey cities of East Germany; now some of the worst examples of communist construction, such as the featureless rows of one-room flats in the cathedral square – are to be demolished. The cathedral is the largest in eastern Germany, a magnificent Gothic edifice which lost most of its stained glass in the Thirty Years' War but escaped serious damage in 1945. Perhaps it was protected by the spirit of Edith, the English

wife of the 10th-century Emperor Otto the Great, whose elaborate tomb is behind the altar. Among the remarkable sculptures in the cathedral is a striking wooden memorial, by Ernst Barlach, to the dead of the First World War. In the 1980s it became a focus for prayers for reconciliation and, in 1989, for the peaceful mass demonstrations which preceded the breaking down of the Berlin Wall.

From Magdeburg, capital of Saxony-Anhalt and only 75 miles south to Torgau, where American and Soviet troops met on the banks of the Elbe on April 25, 1945. Here also is the first Protestant church (built in the 1540s and consecrated by Martin Luther) which has recently been given a new organ. The church is within the precincts of a renaissance castle, with a bear pit at its entrance that is once again inhabited by bears.

Having stopped at Meissen – to admire the cathedral, the Albrechtsburg and the glorious rocco porcelain figures of J.J. Kaendler – our cruise ship returned to Dresden, giving us a day to visit this stunning city. Despite carpet bombing by the RAF in February 1945, much of historic Dresden – it used to be known as "Baroque Florence" – has been and is still being restored to something approaching its former glory. The Zwinger palace, though badly damaged, was rebuilt soon after the war. Its fabulous art collection had been removed from Dresden for the duration. The opera house was reopened more than a decade ago.

The Residenzschloss (the Palace of the Electors and Kings of Saxony) is now being renovated, and the jewel in Baroque Dresden's crown, the Frauenkirche, will once again dominate the city skyline. It is surely impossible not to be moved by the sight of Dresden today. More than half a century after it was demolished by Allied bombers, blackened stone walls and church towers

still bear witness to the terrible firestorm that swept through the city in 1945, killing more than 50,000 people, many of them refugees from the east. Around the ruin of the Frauenkirche, devastated buildings still stand, within yards of a Hilton hotel.

As the ship moved away from the quay, we passed another survivor from the wartime air-raid – one of eight paddle steamers, more than 100 years old, which are still in operation.

Upstream we came to the grandiose Schloss Pillnitz, which has two "oriental" palaces and an English garden where red squirrels play. It was built for Augustus the Strong by the same architect, Matthäus Pöppelmann, who designed the Zwinger. Then we were into the strange landscape of Saxon Switzerland – vertical projections of rock and deep gorges.

War-time memories were never far away: built into a rock above the Elbe, the Königstein fortress, Colditz-like in its appearance, served as a prisoner-of-war camp in both world wars. On the other side of the river, the pretty village of Hohnstein is known as the centre of puppet-making – and as the site of a concentration camp for political detainees in the 1930s.

Our cruise continued a short way into the Czech Republic – the Elbe rises near the Polish border and flows east of Prague – before we turned for home. It was a surprise to learn that we had covered little more than a third of the river's total length of 725 miles. The Elbe is the third longest river of middle Europe (after the Danube and the Rhine); now that it has emerged from behind the Iron Curtain, it is well worth getting to know.

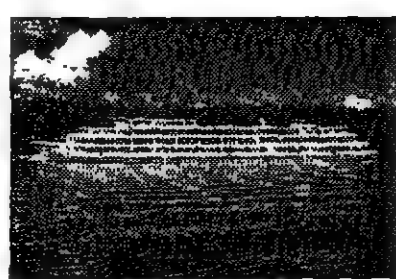
SIMON COURTAULD

● The author was a guest of Peter Deilmann River and Ocean Cruise.

Mother Russia has been blessed with numerous vast rivers, lakes and inland seas which from the earliest of times were the first and natural highways. The adding of canals to these natural assets allow us to travel great distances from the remote forests of Karelya to Moscow and beyond aboard comfortable river vessels which make for a perfect moving hotel.

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- A seven-day cruise on the *MS Dresden* costs £1,090 to £1,635 per person sharing an outside twin cabin; an outside triple cabin starts from £908. Prices include return Lufthansa flights from Heathrow, all meals and travel insurance.
- The season lasts from end March to beginning November: cruises run between Hamburg and Dresden. The *MS Dresden* carries about 110 passengers and about 45 crew and staff.
- The Travel Bookshop (0171-229 5260) recommends *Germany and the Germans*, by John Ardagh (Penguin, £8.99). *Through the German Waterways*, by Philip Briscoe (Nautical Books, £9.95). *In Europe's Name*, by Timothy Garton (Vintage, £9.99).

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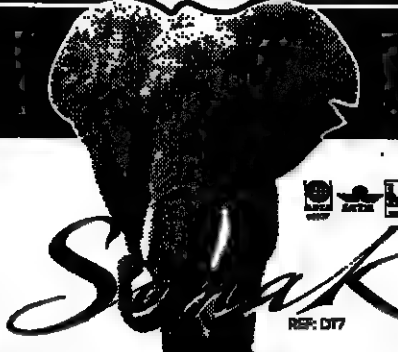
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AROUND THE WORLD: A WEEKEND GUIDE

Reef study with Raleigh

THE youth development charity Raleigh International (0171-371 8585) is looking for 17 to 25-year-old volunteers for its ten-week expeditions working on environmental and community projects in Belize, Chile, Malaysia, Namibia and Uganda.

In the International Year of the Reef, teams who will have completed preliminary sub-aqua training in the UK will join marine scientists on underwater research programmes to help protect one of the world's largest coral reefs off Belize.

In Namibia, volunteers help on school building projects, while the Uganda expedition involves work on health centres in rural areas. Participants are expected to attend a selection weekend, and raise about £2,950 towards the expedition costs with support from Raleigh.

Amazonian adventures

A RAINFOREST holiday staying as the guest of a family who have set up an ecological reserve in the Amazon (£695 for seven days) is offered by Imaginative Travellers (0181-742 8612) in its South American programme for the truly adventurous.

Other unusual trips include an Inca Trail Tour, camping in less well-known sites (£575 for eight days) and a 16-day (£855) Hidden Ecuador Tour, visiting "Cloud Forests", volcanoes, markets and swimming holes. You stay in basic hotels, hostels and palm tree huts, and travel by local bus, train and on foot, with porters or llamas carrying the luggage.

There are opportunities to go riding, rafting and biking on most of the trips. Meals, entrance fees and local transport are included in the price, but not international flights.

NOT AS part of an ecological programme, but to celebrate a wedding, honeymooners at the Pangkor Laut Resort in Malaysia can take part in a tree-planting ceremony in the rainforest, with their names inscribed on a plaque which is placed on the tree. Offered by AsiaWorld (01932 820050), the seven-night B&B holiday on a private island costs £2,152 per couple, including flights.

Horse talk

TWO NEW riding holidays from Andalucia Trails (01992 730706) are based around local festivals in May.

The seven-night Jerez Feria centres on Europe's largest

horsefair, with half the holiday spent riding on beaches, old drover trails and into the Sierra de la Plata, the rest joining in the celebrations and sherry sampling at the fair itself. The cost is £595, fares excluded.

On the 14-day El Rocio Ride, holidaymakers ride along with other pilgrims on horseback, in covered wagons or on foot, on the traditional "Romeria", following an ancient trail through the Coto Donana Nature Reserve to El Rocio for the Feast of the Virgin of Rocio. Picnics, dancing and feasting round campfires are part of the fun. The cost is £1,295 (£1,095 for non-riders), fares excluded.

THE Youth Hostel Association (YHA) is looking for people over 18 who are able to work from April to October in its 240 hostels. No qualifications are required apart from an ability to deal with the public and assist with catering and clerical work. The pay is £335 a month, plus full board and accommodation. Details from the YHA (01629 822074).

Irish sights

CIE Tours International (0990 143910) is offering one free flight to every two holidaymakers who book before April 30 on its new eight-day Hidden Ireland coach tour between May and September. The itinerary includes sightseeing in Dublin and visits to the Guinness Brewery before heading south to Galway, Killarney and the National Stud Farm. The price is from £620.

If you prefer travelling at a slower pace, Stena Line (0990 747474) can set you up with a gypsy-style caravan and an Irish



Raleigh International is looking for people to join marine scientists on underwater research to help to save coral reefs off Belize

draught-cross mare of guaranteed sunny temperament, oats, instruction and suggestions for overnight stays at country pubs or farmhouses. The cost for a week is from £338, which also includes ferry crossings for a car, two adults and a child.

LATEST election hideaway from Kuoni (01306 740500) is the Robinson Crusoe "no news, no shoes" island of Ari Beach, one of the most remote atolls in the Maldives where you sleep in thatched huts with open showers and spend your days in a hammock swinging between palm trees on the beach, occasionally exerting yourself enough to go night fishing or diving among spectacular tropical fish. The price in May is £703 half-board for a week, including flights.

Florida homes

TRADITIONAL Florida homes in low-key destinations, away from the razzamazz of the Orlando theme parks, are on offer from Florida Vacations (01727 841568).

JILL CRAWSHAW'S TRAVEL TIPS

On the six-mile long Capdeva Island, clapham stilt houses are a short boardwalk from the beach through tropical foliage. They cost from £689 for each of five sharing for a week. Other quaint mansions are available in Sanibel, Naples and Marco Island.

In Key West, Conch Homes cost from £699 for each of five people. Prices include flights and basic car hire (with compulsory "extras").

Château nights

KEYTEL International (0171-402 5182), which acts as UK agent for the paradors in Spain and pousadas in Portugal, now also represents 450 châteaux throughout France.

Comforts and costs vary from approximately Fr300-Fr1,200 (£35-£140) per double room per night. A room for two in the Château du Roc Chautru in Perigueux costs Fr254-Fr500 (£30-£59); at the Château Scandillac in Bergerac a night costs between Fr500-Fr560 (£59-£66) and from Fr410-Fr995

(£48-£117) in the Château Pl al Lanne in Brittany's Trebeurden.

THOSE staying near La Pera, about 20 miles from Girona in northeast Spain, can now visit the recently reopened Castillo de Pubol, where Dali spent his final years with his wife Gala. Decorated in surrealist style with some of the couple's original furniture, the castle is open until October from 10.30am to 7.30pm and in November until 6pm. Admission is 600 pesetas (about £2.50) per person. Details from the Spanish National Tourist Office (0171-499 0901).

And so to work

WORKING holidays on National Trust properties this summer involve conservation work and construction projects using ancient and traditional skills.

At Ludshot Common in Surrey, the warden needs help to improve the habitat for protected birds, while on the Marsden Moor Est-

ate in West Yorkshire, fit volunteers are needed to work on moorland restoration, heather and grass seed propagation, bracken control and footpath maintenance. Prices average £50 for a week, £20 for a short break to cover accommodation and meals. For details call the NT Brochureline (0891 517751). Calls are charged at 50p per minute.

On a budget

ALTHOUGH there is now no UK-based reservation agency for the budget Formule 1 hotel chain, a list of the 431 Formule 1 and Etap hotels worldwide is available by phone (0181-741 1001) or from the French Government Tourist Office on its France Information line (0891 244123). Calls are charged at 50p a minute.

Modern and strictly functional with a double bed, single bunk and wash basin (but no shower or WC), colour television and alarm clock, Formule 1 rooms cost Fr119, Fr129 and Fr139 (£14, £15.20 and £16.35) for one, two or three people. Continental breakfast costs Fr22 (£2.60).

Italy on the cheap

TRAVEL NEWS

WITH THE ITALIAN lire continuing to fall, package companies specialising in Italy are pressing its claims as somewhere to make holiday spending money go a long way. Magic of Italy, for example, says that a typical holidaymaker in Florence would spend only 80p on an ice-cream compared with £2.60 if he were in Paris; £5.00 on a pizza meal with a beer compared with £10.40; and £17 on a three-course meal compared with £28.

TOUR OPERATORS are considering applying for a judicial review of the 17.5 per cent Premium Tax on holiday insurance sales through travel agents and tour operators. Desperate lobbying by the industry failed to persuade Parliament in its dying days to amend the plans, which means that the tax on insurance policies bought through agents will be 13.5 per cent higher than those bought through brokers, banks or building societies.

The imposition is unlikely to be a priority for whichever party wins the election so an appeal to the courts is now seen as the only way to have it withdrawn.

TWENTY of Britain's attractions are offering Granny-free days during summer.

Mindful that grandparents are now taking more responsibilities for child-care, the British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers and Attractions is offering free admission when accompanied by a parent and child(ren).

The offer is valid on midweek days until July 18.

Those taking part are: Banham zoo; Blackpool Pleasure Beach; Blackpool Tower; Brean leisure park in Burnham, Somerset; Crealy Park, Exeter; Dinosaur World, Colwyn Bay; Drayton Manor park and zoo; Staffs; Dreamland Fun Park, Margate; Flamingoland, Malton, N. Yorks; Frontierland, Morecambe Bay; Funland and Laserbow, London; Grand Parade, Eastbourne; Lightwater Valley Park, Ripon; Loudon Castle, Ayrshire; Mumbles Pier, Swansea; New Metroland, Gateshead; Paradise Wildlife Park, Herts; Peter Pan's Adventure Playground, Southend; Pleasureland, Southport; Rollerworld, Colchester; Segaworld, London; Twycross zoo, Atherstone; West Midlands safari & leisure park, Kettering.

Holidays by the book

Derwent May on the latest

guides, from B&B to backpacking

Karen Brown must be one of the most indefatigable travellers of all time. She and her team have visited small hotels and bed-and-breakfasts around half of Europe and most of California, and have produced a series of neat, clear guidebooks giving their recommendations, to all of which they append the label "charming".

For example, they have an Italy: Charming Inns and a Italy: Charming Bed and Breakfasts. The first gives maps of enjoyable routes, such as a winding trail through the northern lakes and mountains from Aosta to Venice, and follows it up with details and line-drawings of attractive hotels. The second has no itineraries, but picks out cheap B&Bs such as a farm near Orvieto with views of the Umbrian valley, and a farm outside San Gimignano where breakfast on the patio is served by "jovial hostesses".

Others in the series are France, which has two books with similar titles to Italy:

England, Wales and Scotland together, with "Charming Hotels and Inns"; and England on its own with "Charming Bed and Breakfasts". There are also Inns and Inns in Ireland, Spain and California. (All titles Travel Press, £9.99.) In the Rough Guide series is First-Time Europe by Louis Casa Bianca (Penguin, £7.99), a hard-headed account of such things as money belts, thefts on trains, alcohol and Euro-toilets. Romance creeps in here and there. Far Horizons: Adventure Travel For All by Walt Unsworth (Cicerone Press, £8.99) sets out a tempting panorama of jungles, deserts, islands, and long-distance walks such as the King Ludwig Way in Bavaria.

Rock and Roll Traveler USA by Tim Perry and Ed Glinert (Routledge, £12.99) guides fans not only to the music venues of New York

and Los Angeles, but also to historic street corners and Irish whiskey bars, and even the place where Janis Joplin hit Jim Morrison over the head with a bottle of Southern Comfort. Backpacking in Mexico by Tim Burford (Bradt, £11.95) leads you through the silver mines and the rattlesnakes. Europe By Train 1997 by Katie Wood (Ebury, £10.99) is a fat book on lightweight paper that tells you not only how to get there but also what you will find when you do.

The Ordnance Survey has provided the maps for A Guide to Garden Visits by Judith Hinchings (Michael Joseph, £12.99), which suggests 50 visits to places in Britain with good gardens. The author also recommends attractive hotels. American Walks in Windsor by Richard Tames (Windrush

Press, £9.99) has ten step-by-step itineraries through London that could be followed with pleasure by anybody — Lord Rosebery and Thomas Arne come into it, as well as Woodrow Wilson and Sidney Bechet. Going the other way, the new Blue Guide Museums and Galleries in New York by Carol von Pressentin Wright (Black, £17.99) is splendidly informative and up-to-date.

For France there is a richly illustrated handbook to The Loire Valley (Everyman Guides, £16.99), and one of the most specialised guides I have met, Around and About Paris: The 13th-20th Arrondissements by Thirza Vallois (Llad, £15.95). This takes you through Hausmann's Paris, bringing its history to life in a wealth of detail, just as the author did for her earlier books on arrondissements 1-7 (inner Paris) and 8-12 (the Paris that expanded after the Revolution). This volume leads you to many of the "secret places" of Paris: from the old vineyard of Vaugirard to the couscous restaurants of Belleville.

More thoughts on Jules Verne

A LETTER from a disgruntled couple who took a Voyages Jules Verne holiday to Cuba provoked a flurry of response when printed in Weekend two weeks ago. The Glaziers, of Hertfordshire, changed hotels at their own expense, citing filthy rooms and no hot water. Their flight was also 13 hours late. VJV replied that local advice was that the company switch hotels and suggested the couple may have been unsatisfied to Cuba.

A selection of other letters received included one from Lady Engle, of London N6: "We also travelled with Jules Verne to Cuba. The flight took 18 hours instead of nine as stated in its brochure. Changes of two out of the three hotels advertised had to be accepted without demur. A third-class firm in a time warp?"

From Sir Patrick Salt, Bury St Edmunds: "The journey to Cuba was horrific especially as we had been misled over the length of flight and the number of stops en route. Who would dream of going to Cuba from the UK via Costa Rica? Jules Verne takes your money and then refuses to accept responsibility for the ensuing chaos."

From P. Block, London NW11: "The Glaziers are not the only ones that have complained to Jules Verne but at least

they have had some sort of reply. The time from reporting at Gatwick to arrival at the hotel was 25½ hours. On arrival, we were told we had no reservations. We did not see the rep until our departure a week later. To blame the Cubans is quite wrong."

From Keith and Margaret Wilkes of Kippax, near Leeds: "We visited Cuba for two weeks with Sunworld. We had a first-class guide, driver and coach. Hotels, room, catering and service. Our chalet was spotlessly clean with all amenities, plenty of hot water, linen and towels changed regularly. The food was plain but with a large choice. I felt safer than in Italy — I would recommend Cuba to anyone."

From L.A. McCallum of Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire: "We arranged to do a trip to the Royal Cities of

Rajasthan on December 24. On the 18th we were told the itinerary had been changed, giving us no alternative — it turned out to be a disaster. Jules Verne had the temerity to say the accommodation was as advertised. They will not accept they are in the wrong. We are applying through the small claims courts for compensation."

From Sheila and John Jukes of Cumnor, near Oxford: "We have recently returned from a VJV tour of the Royal Cities of Rajasthan and have nothing but praise for the way the trip was organised. We were informed of changes to the schedule well before the departure date. Hotels had been upgraded and the ambitious programme for a 14-day tour covering 1,600 miles ran like clockwork."

From J.G. Greenly of Wolverhampton: "My wife and I have been on six holidays with VJV and on only one was there a change to the original dates — we were offered either our money back or transfer to another holiday. It may be that the couple who complained would have been happier with a more developed place like Florida."

• We welcome letters on holiday travel. Send them to: Letters, Travel Department, The Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN or fax 0171-782 5124.

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- 4th Day Morning Visit to the Great Wall.
- 5th Day Day at leisure.
- 6th Day Travel by train to Chengde. 2 nights at the Mountain Villa Hotel.
- 7th Day Full day sightseeing in Chengde.
- 8th Day Return by rail to Beijing. 2 nights at the Gloria Plaza Hotel.
- 9th Day Day at leisure.
- 10th Day Early afternoon departure by Air China. Arrive London Heathrow late the same day.

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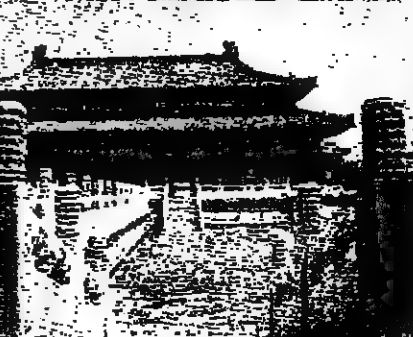
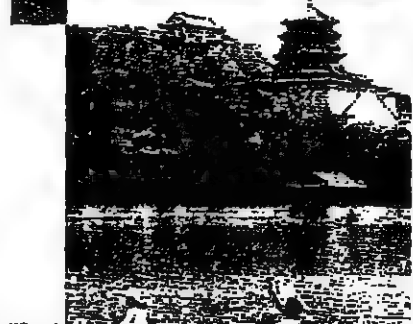
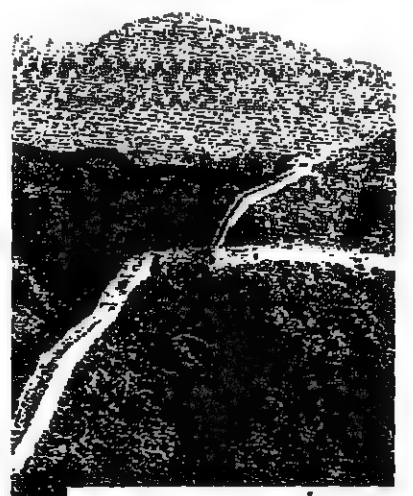
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The Antipodes: Southern Australia has untouched bush, dusty roads and empty, golden beaches ...

Stroke a euro, grow a yacka

ADELAIDE

LEAVING Heathrow airport close to midnight on the first day of the month, I arrive at Adelaide, South Australia, 24 sleepless hours later at six in the morning of the third day, feeling spectral. At the airport, I am met by a smiling chauffeur behind the wheel of a 1950s stretched Chevrolet, a gigantic machine which whisks me into town. I check in at the Hilton hotel and eat a second unnecessary breakfast, then take a dazed stroll in the dazzling sun.

The streets are wide, laid out in a grid by the far-seeing Colonel Light in the 1830s. Traffic runs smoothly; there are no jams. Public buildings, such as the town hall, are unmistakably British colonial; other buildings form a mini-Manhattan. Local heroes deemed statue-worthy are

explorers, such as Charles Sturt. The pace on the streets is unhurried. There are few men in suits. I return to the hotel and lie down on the bed. It is 11 o'clock and I feel obstinately wakeful. The next I see of my watch it tells me I have been asleep for more than five hours.

UP AT 7.30 the next day, feeling disconcertingly normal. Rae Grierson, from the travel company Fruits of Inheritance, picks me up and drives me to the Barossa, an hour away.

This is where the wine comes from, including Jacob's Creek, Britain's favourite Aussie tipple, alas not my family vineyard. The Barossa is green, toiled over, lived-in, ripe. We pick our way through wineries, sampling as we go.

After not much of this I am unsure whether it is renewed jet lag or booze that is making me groggy.

We have lunch at an excellent small restaurant, £5 for a main course that would cost three times as much at home. I settle for chicken in pastry but nibble at somebody else's kangaroo. This, I am told, should be compared to a piece of well-hung Charolais beef: it lacks fat and is good for your cholesterol level. After a few more experiments I find I do not much like "native" foods, such as emu pâté, except for the fish (especially whiting) and the fruit and vegetables, which are magically robust, big and fresh.

On the way back to Adelaide we pause on a hilltop and look down at the valley. It is Germanically neat, which is not surprising because the church spires are Lutheran and the village is formed on a German pattern, with houses side by side and cultivated land laid out in long strips behind them. The valley looks as if it had been lived in for ever. But the Germans have been here barely 150 years.

MURRAY RIVER

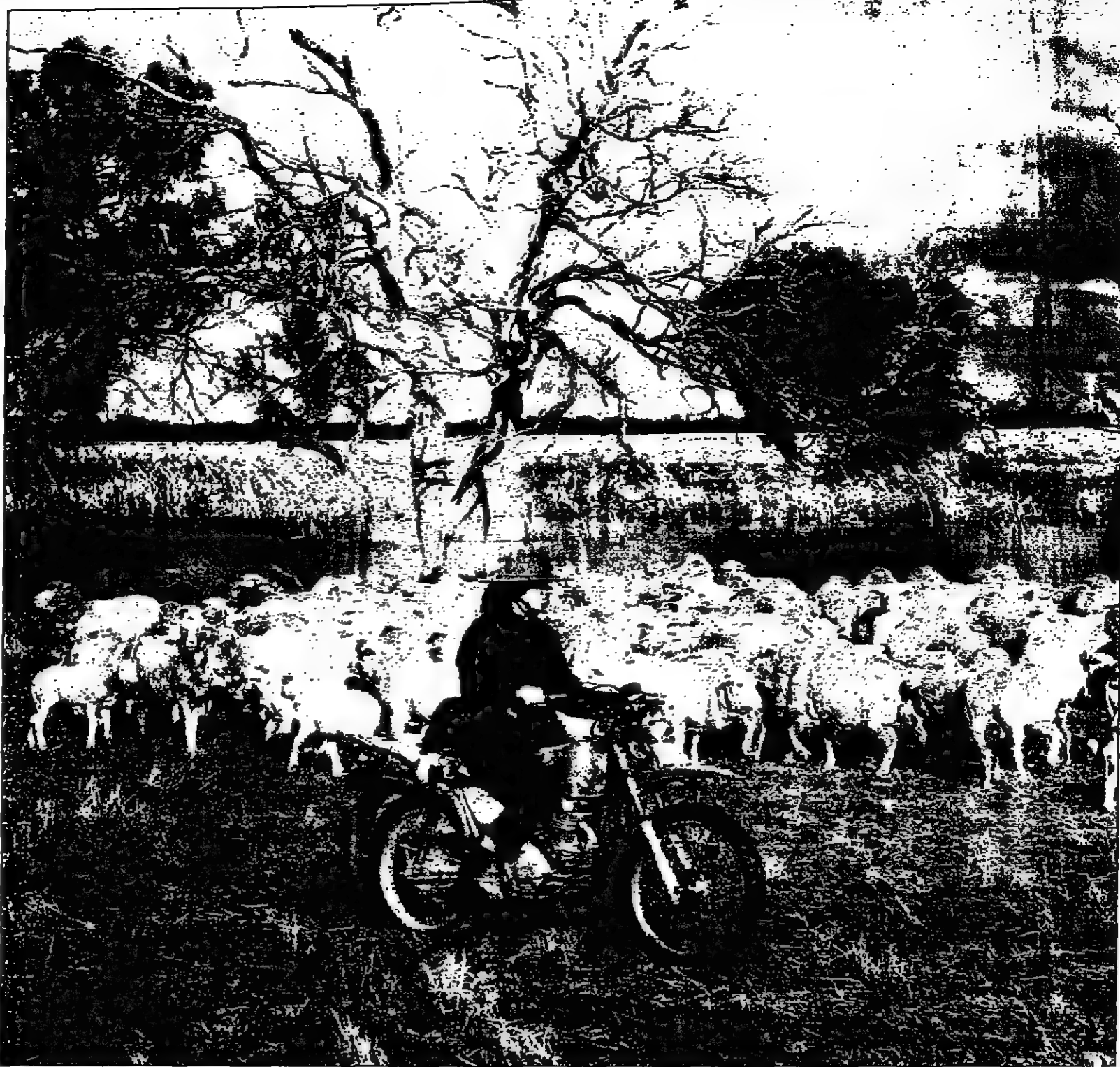
A DROP OF rain falling into this river in Queensland will take five months to reach the Southern Ocean, a few miles downstream from where I board the *Proud Mary* for a short cruise. The Murray is part of one of the world's largest river systems. But, shame on me, I have never heard of it. It is broad, muddy, willow-banked. Fish rise and sulphur-crested cockatoos squawk raucously. Pelicans flap by expressionless. Water skiers swoosh along.

My cabin is comfortable but too small for more than one person to dress in. All passengers are issued with name badges. We display first names only, out of respect for Australian mateyness, a style of behaviour I rather like.

We take a bus trip and embark on a non-energetic walk to some waterfalls. Our guide, Paul, points out the difference between trees and plants that live in or near the water and others that live on the (usually very) dry land. Trees that would die standing in water have learnt not to, and have learnt to survive long dry seasons as well.

It seems the craggy landscape was, half a billion years ago, a mountain range as high as the Himalayas. Erosion continues. That tall, waisted rock over there will one day be worn through and the top half will topple down to join all the other boulders scattered about. But I shall not be here to see it. At the end of our walk Paul tells us we have seen at least eight varieties of bird and 16 trees and plants.

After dark we get back on the tour bus, now equipped with a lamp for spotlighting wombats. They seem to me an unattractive, pig-like creature, often scared from fighting over females, but the old ladies aboard "ooh" and "aah" as though the wombats were cuddly cats. Caught in the light, the wombats stumble about foolishly or scuttle down their burrows. In the distance I see my first kangaroos. Paul tells us a kangaroo with two "joeys" in her pouch can provide them with different milks to suit their maturity. I imagine a row of taps, as on a pub counter.



On the sheep stations, as farms are called, the "paddocks" are fields of several thousand acres where the only way to get around is by bike or truck.

PURDIE STATION

IAN CLARKE meets me off the boat and drives us to his station, as farms here are called. The wool market is in poor shape. What it needs, I hear, is another world war, so we can all get back into khaki. Failing that, the Clarks have diversified into hospitality, restoring their home and adding a kitchen and a dining room/sitting room. There is a chef. We eat hogget in considerable style.

In the morning Ian takes me on a boat trip through the creek at the bottom of his garden, out through a lagoon into the Murray River, circling back to the creek through another lagoon. Ian's creek is a genuine billabong: though fed from the river, it never dries up. I hope I have at least this bit of Oz lore right.

Later we drive through Ian's paddocks, as he calls fields of several thousand acres. I am beginning to realise that the plant and animal life in the two environments—river and land—are completely different.

Ian, I notice, carries a gun in his truck. Why? To shoot kangaroos and stray (feral) dogs. The dogs kill the sheep and the kangaroos eat their grass. We see no dogs but several kangaroos. The first two or three Ian poops off at hop away into trees. But, firing from the driver's seat, he gets a line on a kangaroo that is slower off the mark. We drive closer and Ian puts a last shot through its head. He gets out with a knife in one hand, a steel in the other. He cuts up the dead animal and throws the pieces in to the truck. Back at the station they are fed to a bunch of pups.

■ Singapore Airlines' return flights to Adelaide, from London or Manchester, start at £649 in low season (April 16-June 13) and are available through the long-haul specialist Austravel (0171-734 7753). The airline occasionally runs special offers. Information from its reservations line (0181-747 0007). Ground arrangements are all bookable through Austravel.

■ Adelaide Hilton, £50 per person a night, based on twin share. Room only.

■ A two-night/three-day Murray River cruise on board the *Proud Mary* paddle-steamer, costs £260 per person, based on twin share, including all meals, shore excursions and activities.

■ Portree Station, Blanchetown, from £38 per person a night, based on twin share, and including breakfast and three-course dinner.

FACT FILE



■ Arkaroola Tourist Resort, Northern Flinders Ranges, £45 per person a night twin share. Room only.

■ Kangaroo Island Odysseys (wildlife safaris), with Anna Howard, cost £264 per person

for a two-day, one-night tour, based on twin share.

■ Barossa Valley, Limestone Country Estate, from £45 per person per night, based on two sharing, including dinner and breakfast.

■ Barossa Valley, self-drive wine touring to the Barossa. A four-day/three-night round trip from Adelaide, including rental car and accommodation, from £128 per person, based on two travelling together.

■ For general information on holidaying in South Australia, call the Aussie Helpline on 0900 022000.

■ Reading: *Manning Clark's History of Australia*, by Manning Clark (Penguin, £15). *Cooper's Creek*, by Alan Moorehead (Penguin, £6.99). *South Australia*, by Denis O'Byrne (Lonely Planet, £8.99).

Curdinmurka strip: Across the railway line from the airstrip, a tented camp has arisen. Perhaps 4,000 people have come, mostly by road, bringing their tents and campers with them. Queues for showers form at a huge truck. The toilets are of the improvised variety, i.e., horrid, smelly holes in the ground. I am awarded a place in a tent for two and a swag (sleeping bag).

Darkness falls. I struggle into my dinner jacket, eat a barbecued dinner and ride in an open wagon a few hundred yards up the railway line to the ball. There is a large springy dance floor, soon covered by swaying, gyrating, slightly manic people of all ages. Alongside the floor is a platform from which the night's chief entertainer, surrounded by a deafening corps of musicians, is belting out songs that sound vaguely familiar. He is Patrick MacMahon and is, I learn, a Neil Diamond singalike. My sense of unreality increases. Here I am, out in the desert and all dressed up, a million miles from anywhere familiar, and I am watching not a singer but

Continued on next page

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... while the North Island of New Zealand has vast, thriving farms and cities with metropolitan chic



Russell Pier, jutting out into the tranquil waters of the Bay of Islands, was not always so serene. It has a steamy past. As the country's first capital, Russell was a brawling, bawdy port described as "the hell-hole of the Pacific"

Continued from page 18
his doppelgänger. I marvel at the willingness of Australians to toil after their pleasures. These are people who will drive 200 kilometres for lunch. Only the Irish can match their pursuit of good times.

KANGAROO ISLAND

HERE, another short plane-ride from Adelaide, is South Australia in a nutshell. There are dusty roads, stretches of untouched bush and empty, golden beaches. Sheep graze in what might be English meadows if it were not for the koalas above them in the trees. We come across a team of conservationists plotting the spread of the koala population by satellite and computer. It seems there are too many of them. They strip trees bare and make life hard for other animals and birds. So they will have to be culled.

I see penguins noisily settling down for the night after a day feeding at sea, and wallabies hopping by. A kangaroo allows itself to be stroked and, at a picnic, one wallaby even accepts a slice of avocado. Huge sea lions stretch out on a beach. One little fellow toddles anxiously among them look-

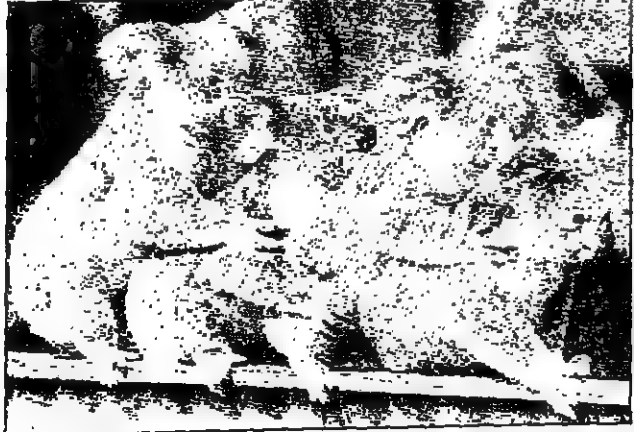
ing for its mother. He tries to cuddle up to one but is snapped at, and waddles away. We humans are kept at a distance so we will not disrupt their ancient colony.

Flying home, I ruminate on why Australians have caught the heritage bug. Every shack in the outback seems to be being tarted up and touted as a site of historic interest. But Australia's real history is in its pre-history, in the creation of its landscape and the slow evolution of its plants and trees and animals — and in its Aboriginal peoples, of whom I have seen almost nothing (apart from one man waving a beer can enthusiastically at the Nell Diamond singalike).

I find myself wishing that Australia would devote more of its energies to preserving, say, the several varieties of kangaroo that are dying out and less to prying up the vanity of Europeans' interest in their own brief occupation of the land. My peevishness about this on getting home is a dozen times intensified by jet lag, which is fearsome.

ERIC JACOBS

● The writer was a guest of Singapore Airlines and the South Australia Tourism Commission



On Kangaroo Island excess koalas are being culled

Where the tree god rules

Between Auckland and the Bay of Islands, along the sometimes unsealed road which runs through Dargaville, the centre of New Zealand's Dalmatian community, stands all that is left of the great kauri forests which covered the land before the loggers came from Europe and laid them waste. The greatest individual survivor is Tane Mahuta or "God of the Forest", a 2,000-year-old tree which, according to Maori lore, is the son of the All Sky Father and the Earth Mother. It is certainly a big tree — nearly 140ft tall and almost 40ft in girth.

By the roadside nearby, a signpost advises: "You are in the heart of a small remnant of Earth's most ancient ecosystems. Breathe deeply and tread softly." Standing in the presence of a living object which was a sapling during the life of Christ, I was inclined to do just that: Tane Mahuta certainly made a century and a half of Western civilisation in these remote islands seem puny by comparison.

Later, I read in the *North and South* magazine that the postwar generation of New Zealanders are just hitting the 50-year mark. 47,524 of them born in 1946 alone. "In our time," the author wrote, "New Zealand has been transformed from a green and sleepy overprotected agricultural economy to a rambunctious South Pacific casino."

Tane Mahuta and the "rambunctious casino" seemed light years apart and yet, travelling from top to toe of the North Island, I saw enough metropolitan chic and raw wilderness to suspect that there was room for both.

My first image of New Zealand was an obviously omnivorous one of bunter and sheep. Sir Edmund Hillary and the All Black rugby forward Colin Meads. I was aware of Kiri Te Kanawa (whose appearance in *Don Giovanni* was a sell-out during my visit), Kerry Hulme and the Booker prize-winning *The Bone People*. Katherine Mansfield and Ngao Marsh, but they paled before my sense of rugged farmers and VC-winning Anzacs.

In a tour just over a week long I stayed only one night in a large hotel, and even that was a complex of timber cabins set around a "lodge" in thick bush at the foot of the Coromandel peninsula. The rest of the time I was in accommodation of a less personal kind, ranging from urban B&B or "boutique hotel" to two rural "farm stays", where one ate with the family and slept in their spare room. The two farms could not have been a more complete



NEW ZEALAND FACT FILE

- Silk Cut Travel, Meon House, College Street, Petersfield, Hampshire GU2 3JN. Reservations and Tailor Made Inquiries, 01730 265211. Air New Zealand, 0181-846 9595.
- Tim Heald took a trip with Silk Cut Travel's (01730 230370) new programme to New Zealand, which focuses on accommodation in private homes, working farms and lodges. Sixteen-night fly-drive packages start from £2,125 per person (April 1 to June 30) based on two sharing. The price includes return scheduled flights from London Heathrow to Auckland with Air New Zealand, farm-stay accommodation on a half-board basis and car hire. Executive-stay fly-drives, accommodation with families in private homes, start from £2,768 per person (April 1 to June 30).
- New Zealand Tourism Board, New Zealand House, 80 Haymarket, London SW1Y 4TQ (0171-839 0360).
- Reading: *Oxford Illustrated History of New Zealand* (£29) and *The Oxford Book of New Zealand* (£7.99), both by Keith Sinclair (OUP). *New Zealand Travel Survival Kit* Lonely Planet, £12.99. *Mobil Guide to New Zealand* (Heinemann, £14.99).

contrast. The first was in the far north, a few miles inland from the first capital, Russell, now a quiet seaside resort but once a brawling, bawdy port described as "the hell-hole of the Pacific". Across the water lies Waitangi, where the British and the Maoris signed a famous land treaty, now widely deplored. Waitangi also has a lush and spectacular golf course.

Sam Ludbrook was a former captain of the golf club and fulfilled my expectations by being an accomplished all-round sportsman and countryman, robust in attitude and speech. Once, we stood outside his home, Ludbrook House, gazing across the croquet lawn and the ha-ha to his grazing beef cattle and the luminous blue of a campers' tent, pitched by the bank of his creek. Sam was gratified by the campers because they had taken the trouble to call at the door and ask his permission. This was gladly given and he had advised them on the best spot to choose.

Many other campers, however, did not ask. On one occasion, driving to golf with his wife Chris, he came across four of his bullocks sauntering

down the main road, running the gauntlet of cars and trucks. The nearest gate was swinging free and there in his field was a family enjoying a picnic. Sam, not mincing words, explained to them that they had released thousands of dollars worth of his assets on to the public highway, were eating their lunch on his property, and would they remove themselves. They left, muttering.

Sam also has trouble with mushroom-pickers. Once, after spying a man gathering up armfuls of fungi on his land, he pursued the man's car for two hours. Eventually it drew up outside a suburban house in Whangarei. Sam got out of his car and cut two cabbages from the garden. When the mushroom-picker remonstrated, Sam said: "You've been helping yourself to my veggie, now I'm helping myself to yours."

Although Ludbrook House was built only in the Twenties, Ludbrooks have been farming that land since the pioneer days of the last century. Many of them lie in the graveyard outside the white church at Te Waimate, where Bishop

Selwyn briefly had his headquarters. Inside the church, the hatching of the 58th Foot, the Rutlandshires, commemorates their service and, sometimes, death in the Maori wars of 1845.

So the Ludbrooks are, in every sense, part of the soil. New Zealand born and bred. Not so the Ellises, of Watership Down. Roland and Claire have a 350-acre sheep farm overlooking Lake Taupo with Mount Ruapehu on the horizon. This supposedly dormant volcano erupted last year affording the Ellises a grandstand view of the ensuing pyrotechnics. Pumice and other volcanic residue are part of the landscape.

Roland, or "Roly", was the fifth generation of his family to play rugby football for Rugby School, and subsequently served as a major in the 15th/19th Hussars. After many years' contract farming in Britain he decided this was a mug's game and that he must have his own property. Britain was too expensive, so, in 1992, he bought a small part of what had once been the station of Prime Minister Keith Holyoake and set about building a house and establishing his own farm.

In appearance, ruddy, burly and corduroyed, with a plumy voice, he seemed, at first, the ultimate Pom. Yet in his identification with the land he farms he seemed as much of a Kiwi as Sam Ludbrook.

Outside the house everything is still quite raw: the wood of the single storey house still bright, the saplings along the newly gravelled driveway pliant in the breeze. Inside, however, photographs of cavalry officers and racehorses, family silver, exposed timber and a comfortable sofa make one feel that Roly and Claire must have been in situ for as long as the Ludbrooks.

The farm is named Watership Down after property in Berkshire owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber that Roly once looked after. Appropriately, the place is ankle-deep in Hazels and Thumpers, or "bloddy rabbits" as Roly

said with feeling. The little beasts, he added, were almost as pestilential as possums. Possums were kept under marginal control by the Government's regular "carrot drops", in which poisoned carrots were dropped from aircraft in a Pythonesque attempt to cull them. Roly didn't think either possums or bunies in the least bit cuddly. Like the thistles, which no amount of spraying could eliminate, they were the enemy.

After breakfast, we drove in his elderly Japanese truck to the kennels, picked up his three working dogs, and toured the property. It could almost have been a hill farm in Wales or Scotland.

Despite the dodgy clutch, we negotiated every steep hillside to the summit, and the views were stupendous. Standing there, Roly pointed to his boundaries and charted the progress of the surrounding farms. One over there one had just been sold for forestry; another was being turned over to dairy. Before long he was afraid he would be the only sheep farmer left in the vicinity. He wasn't happy. A whole way of life, his way of life, seemed to be under threat.

There has been a drift from the land to the city in New Zealand, and yet, despite the magazine article positing the notion of the "rambunctious casino", I was unconvinced. In Auckland I stayed in an elegant "boutique hotel" run by Mariette Henning-Wells. It was the epitome of suburban

chic, with a Kiwi twist — a pool overlooked by kumquat, hibiscus, mandarin, oleander and palm, and a breakfast menu which began with the message, "I would like to greet the day in slow motion."

In Wellington, the B&B was a modern apartment overlooking the harbour. It was owned by the country's leading manufacturer of liquorish.

In both cities there were modern shopping malls, cool new restaurants on converted quaysides, local seafood and Sauvignon Blanc. I was impressed but not awed. One morning earlier I had woken at dawn and set sail across Lake Taupo under the gaze of an old volcano and sacred Maori forests to breakfast in Hor Water Bay, where the sand was baking underfoot and steam rose off the waters.

Halfway across I plunged a line off the stern of the yacht, *Clearwater Pride*, and a 7lb rainbow trout obligingly sank its jaws into the hook and emerged in time to be baked for lunch with a stuffing of fresh mint and kiwi fruit. The experience made me feel almost as close to nature as the farmers with whom I had stayed.

Civilised though its cities may be, New Zealand is still, essentially, the land where Tane Mahuta reigns supreme.

TIM HEALD

● The author was a guest of Silk Cut Travel and Air New Zealand.

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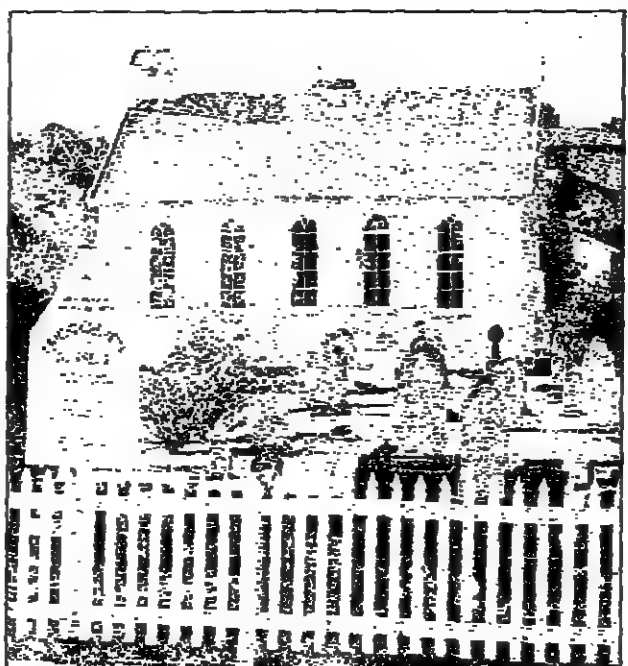
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Christ Church, Russell, said to be the country's oldest church

Brittany: Under canvas on a luxurious site, and walking in Arthur's footsteps



The 16th-century Manoir du Cleuziou, not far from Belle-Isle-en-Terre in central Brittany, whose splendid grounds contain magnificent camping sites that are ideal for families

Remember that depressing smell of damp tent as you unrolled it on arrival at your camping site? The disappearance of those two crucial pegs so that it flapped all night in the wind? The ground with a bump under your hip and a hollow under your head? The wet that came through because the fly sheet had mysteriously disappeared since the last time you camped? And that was just the first night.

Times have changed. Now, when you tell friends you have just returned from camping with the children, and they say "Oh, great", with that half-disguised look of pity, you can keep your secret to yourself.

The tent at our Brittany campsite was already set up for us, a spacious affair with a sitting and kitchen area in front and two sleeping areas to the rear (one with two beds for the children, the other with a double bed for the parents), with a thin area between for hanging up clothes. The tent pegs were all in place. The floor was firm and flat. A proper gas stove with four rings and a grill sat reassuringly next to the fridge, with crockery, cutlery, pots, pans and corkscrew stored in units. There was even an electric light which worked. A dining table could be moved outside and set up with a sun umbrella. This was tough camping.

The Manoir du Cleuziou, not far from Belle-Isle-en-Terre on the road between Guingamp and Morlaix in central Brittany, was our choice. The camping sites in the grounds of the manor house, dating back to the 16th century, are secluded behind hedges and flowers. All the facilities of the manor — swimming pool, tennis court, billiard room, volleyball court, grassy play-area for children, shop — are available to the campers.

The sites belong either to the Manoir or to one of two camping organisations. We were with French Country Camping, which makes a point of having two "mature" couriers to look after their campers. Ours were Bill and Win, a good-humoured couple who were more like parents, always there to help out. Bill could usually be found repairing bicycles (rental was free, with helmets), preparing the ground (one mole was

Camping for connoisseurs



Campers enjoying the swimming pool at Manoir du Cleuziou

FACT FILE

■ French Country Camping, Canute Court, Toll Road, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0NL (01455 62624).

■ A tent at Manoir du Cleuziou for two adults and up to four children, return ferry crossing and travel pack costs £591 a week in peak summer, £329 in late August. Mobile homes and country chalets also available.

■ Ferry and Le Shuttle crossings are arranged through the leading operators. Multi-site holidays can also be arranged. There are sites in Italy, Switzerland and Spain as well as all over France. Sites are chosen for their character and tend to be small and secluded.

■ Reading: *French Ennée — Brittany*, by Patricia Fenn (Quiller, £6.95). *Everyman Brittany* (Everyman, £16.99). *Camping Caravaning: Le guide* (Michelin, £3.50).

in residence, too) or advising on places to go or which restaurants to visit. The children took to Win instantly. Campers with the other organisations said how much they enjoyed us two organisers.

This is a holiday for families. Within about 8.6 seconds of pulling in after the drive from the ferry at Caen, five-year-old Laura had rushed up to our daughters and whisked them off to the playground. Her family, we later discovered, had postponed their trip south to stay on longer because they liked Cleuziou so much. Children adore the freedom to rush where

they want around the spacious grounds, though you may have to keep them away from the pool. The Manoir is miles out in the country and parents accustomed to constant vigilance suddenly find themselves relaxing. Another pleasure for town-dwellers being so far out in the sticks is the complete absence of light pollution at night. Hale-Roppers at Cleuziou will be in heaven at present.

Cleuziou is well signposted along pretty lanes running past farmland where cows easily outnumber people. This is Brittany off the beaten track, where you have to drive half an hour

to reach the pink granite coast. The villages are picturesque, houses yellow-stoned or whitewashed, with immaculate displays of geraniums when we visited in late August.

We were newcomers to the pleasures of Brittany. The Concorde restaurant near the church in Louargat has good food, with menus from about Fr60 to Fr100. The tiny market there provides delicious pâtés, mussels and other produce for a cook-up at the campsite. Live rabbits, ducklings and chickens were a further distraction, but not for the pot. Neighbouring Belle-Isle-en-

Terre has an unpretentious charm and is worth a visit, especially when the circus is in town. Camels and llamas were grazing on the green when we wandered past.

But the short drive to the pink granite coast, which stretches from Trégastel in the west to Bréhat in the east, yielded all kinds of pleasures. One of our favourite spots was St Michel-en-Grève, where the beach is vast and there is a gorgeous view from the churchyard with its elaborate and colourful gravestones. For those willing to drive further afield the whole of west Brittany lies ready to explore.

Back at the campsite after a day out you can eat at the snack bar by the pool and there is a crêperie in the cellar of the Manoir, but for a treat one night the restaurant is excellent. Fillet of red mullet with crispy arachoke chips, potato stuffed with crab, rabbit in a caramel sauce... this made a change from the honest fare we had cooked back at the tent. There was also a two-stage main course: *demi-croquette rôlée*, where a quarter of the duck comes in a sauce made from chives, the local spicy spirit, followed by a crispier quarter with lettuce. The five set menus range from Fr90 to Fr225, where you leave the choice to the chef. Children can have three courses for Fr60. Camping in this style is a relaxing way to spend a holiday and will not break the bank. We will be back, if the clamouring of small voices is anything to go by.

TIMOTHY RICE

■ The author was a guest of French Country Camping.

In the Gallic footsteps of King Arthur

The forest of Paimpont is all that remains of the great medieval hunting forest of Brocéliande, a setting filled with folklore in the green country west of Rennes. Legend has it that Joseph of Arimathea sheltered in Brocéliande after the Crucifixion, taking with him the Holy Grail, the cup Christ drank from at the Last Supper.

The French also believe that King Arthur, Merlin, Sir Lancelot and the rest were Bretons who lived in the forest, and never came to England at all. This may seem unlikely to a true-blue Brit, but to add lustre to this claim the local people have recently enshrined their Arthurian legends in the form of a circular walk in the woods. The three-

day trek is a quest in itself, through a countryside crammed with romantically-named places, like Folle Penée and la Val Sans Retour, Merlin's Tomb, The Golden Tree and the Rock of the Goat; these names alone should make you want to go there.

The walk began, as all walks should, with a very long lunch. This was taken at the Relais de Brocéliande, a small loggia by the lake at Paimpont. Seafood and crêpes and a bottle or two of local cidre-bouche did not prepare us for the walk or the sight of the hotel parrot drinking beer from a tap on the bar.

Paimpont is pretty, with a medieval abbey and a great lake and plenty of walks in the surrounding woods. Our walk

that afternoon was a rather long 13 miles, mostly on forest tracks. It might have been shorter but we got lost and saw not a sign of a knight or a fairy. Eventually we emerged from the woods and found signs to our first night stop, the Manoir de Terre, a romantic hotel on the outskirts of Paimpont.

Parts of the Manoir date back to the Middle Ages, and a recent owner was a leading light of the Breton Druids, but today the hotel attracts lovers who dine by candlelight with fingers entwined and mud-spattered walkers from the surrounding woods who sit about in their socks. There is a dog and a big log fire, a useful bar, a flock of sheep, four-poster beds and a very muddy walk to a spot in the nearby woods where the Druids used to gather.

We squeaked down there after breakfast next day and learnt that the essential requirements for Druid gathering are holly, beech and chestnut trees, a rushing stream, mistletoe and a flat rock; lay on that lot and you will soon be waist-deep in Druids. All this was good colourful stuff but our quest was for King Arthur and we pressed on for the Fontaine de Barenton and another dose of Arthurian legend.

The Fontaine lies deep in the woods and, because we were once again lost, we got there in the end by following a group of French schoolchildren out for a cultural ramble. The story of Barenton concerns Merlin, King Arthur's personal wizard, who fell in love with the fairy Viviane who lived hereabouts. For reasons yet unknown she shut him in a stone by the Fontaine de Barenton



Fontaine de Barenton, where Merlin is said to be captive

where he still lurks and works his magic.

Local legend has it that if you pour water on Merlin's Stone at the Fontaine it will start to rain. Since it rains every five minutes in Brittany at the best of times this seemed a fair bet, but the snag is to find the right stone.

In the end we poured water on every stone around the Fontaine and, sure enough, it started to rain. Within five minutes it was coming down like stair-rods. It was still raining when we checked into the Auberge de la Table Ronde at Neant sur Yvel that evening and, when we went down to dinner, water was pouring across the floor of

the bar from a leak in an upstairs bathroom. Pouring water on Merlin's Stone should only be done with care.

The final leg of the walk, 19 miles back to the car at Paimpont, is, frankly, something of a slog. On the other hand the scenery is superb and this day offered the finest walking of the trip, up the Valley of No Return to the castle of Lanolot du Lac at Trecesson beside rushing streams, along ridges above valleys cloaked with gorse. We managed to get lost yet again above the Val Sans Retour but were rescued by the same schoolchildren we had met the day before: they are now convinced that Folle Penée was founded by the English.

FACT FILE

■ Brittany Ferries (0990 360360) offers a five-day excursion fare to St Malo from £152.

■ The closest port to Paimpont is St Malo, which is served by Brittany Ferries from Portsmouth. Full details from any ABTA travel agent or from Brittany Ferries on the number above.

■ Walking holidays in Brittany can also be arranged through Inshuttle of Hovingham, Yorkshire (01453 628811).

■ Walkers in Brittany will need boots or stout trainers, a rainproof apron and a small daypack. The Michelin Green Guide to Brittany, in English, explains the history and legends of Brocéliande.

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WORD WATCHING

Answers from page 25

VERATRUM

(c) A perennial genus of the family Veratraceae of liliaceous plants belonging to this genus, especially the white hellebore (*Veratrum album*); also a rhizome of this. From the Latin *veratrum* hellebore. "Veratrum has likewise been found useful in epilepsy, and other convulsive complaints."

WITTICASTER

(a) and (b) A petty or inferior wit, a wittling. Thus, any broadcaster or television "host". By analogy with poetaster. *Latham's Dictionary* of 1782 cites Milton: "The mention of a nobleman seems quite sufficient to arouse the spleen of one witticaster."

VASQUINE

(c) Petticoat. From the obsolete French *basquine*. Walter Scott, 1820: "I shall endure her presence without any desire to damage either her curch or vasquine." Her what, Sir Walter? Her curch is her kerchief or headscarf.

WHINNOCK

(c) The smallest pig in a litter, the runt. Perhaps from the root of *whine*. "A Cadma, the least of the Pigs which a Sow hath at one farc; it is also called the Whinnock."

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Norfolk: The empty north coast full of pleasures; the medieval county town full of churches and pubs



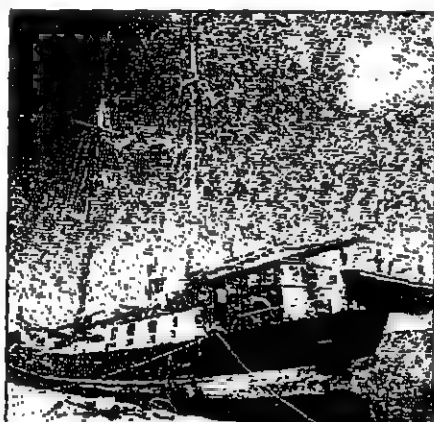
The windmill is the giveaway that you are in Norfolk, and between Cley next the Sea (above) and Burnham Market you will find almost every pleasure, from walking the wild and stunning coastline to eating, from golf to riding to watersports

Where to live off the flat of the land

It is said that the art of taking a break lies in not breaking your neck when you take one. The surest way of returning from a break in a state of nervous collapse is to go without a plan, trusting only to serendipity, which, in my experience, inclines more to dips than serenity.

There is nowhere within a three-hour drive of London or the East Midlands that is at once so empty and yet so full as the north Norfolk coast, between Burnham Market and Cley next the Sea. Empty (comparatively) of traffic and people, full of almost every possible pleasure, from walking the wild and stunning coastline to eating; from golf to riding to sailing, from windsurfing to sightseeing. Even the most hyperactive child can be reduced by the sportier pursuits to a little pile of exhaustion.

Burnham Market, within almost a longbow-shot of the salt marshes and the sea beyond, is as good a place to start as any, a Go-Between village with a single road bisecting the wide village green. On either side of it the Georgian façades are unchanged, although many of them now conceal fine restaurants, food shops, galleries, bookshops,



Seafood is king at Wells-Next-The-Sea

and Mike Gurney's legendary fishmongery, with Miv Watt's stylish Fish Café above — a perfect place to lunch on oysters or *bouillabaisse*, or perfect place.

Bearing in mind that your first imperative will be to find a bed for the night, and a good dinner. The Hoste Arms, on the green, offers you the choice of a spacious four-poster or cozy chintz bedrooms (all en suite, and all supplied with walking maps). It has five attractive eating areas and almost as many

ethnic cuisines, including traditional English which you can enjoy unpastorised and unpolluted.

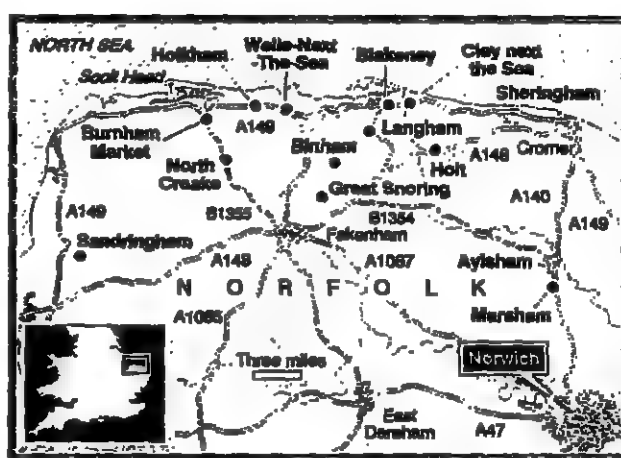
On Sunday mornings, and at night, the bar is a "local", not only for the occasional Royal and its guests from nearby Sandringham, but for more beautiful faces per square foot than anywhere else in Norfolk. If, on the other hand, you would prefer the quiet of a rural farmhouse, and a B&B that far transcends those modest initials, then at North Creake, just slightly

NORTH NORFOLK COAST FACT FILE

■ The Hoste Arms, Burnham Market, Norfolk PE31 8LD (01328 736 777, fax 01328 730 105); three-course dinner about £20 a head, excluding wine. Weekend break (two nights) £76-£84 per person, with breakfast. Single room with shower, £110. Low-season midweek breaks available.

■ Bed and breakfast at the Bretingham-Smiths, Giebe Farmhouse, Wells Road, North Creake, Fakenham NR21 9LD (01328 730133, fax 01328 730 444); en suite double room £40 a night, attic double £32 a night. Also recommended: The Old Rectory, West Beckham, Nr Holt NR25 6NZ (01263 824394) £20 per head. Fine supper £15.

■ Gurney's Fish Café, Market Place, Burnham Market (01328 739967); bring your own wine, no corkage charge, £10-£15. Yetman's Restaurant, Norwich Road, Holt (01263 713320); av £30-35 per head incl wine, closed Tues. The Moorings (Bernard & Carla Phillips, Freeman Street, Wells-Next-The-Sea (01328 710 949); av £30 incl wine. Ring for opening times.



inland from Burnham Market, you will find the gentle and civilised Jeremy Bretingham-Smith and his wife Mary McCarthy (daughter of the Old Bloomsburyite Desmond MacCarthy) and herself one of the leading stencillers in the country. Delights of their farmhouse include either an enchantingly decorated double room *en suite*, or an almost equally enchanting attic bedroom, just as sweet, but not quite so *en* — the bathroom is two paces down the corridor. Breakfast (as late and as

leisurely as you like) is a serious, home-made event, served with as much solitude or conversation as you like. I'd plump for the conversation if I were you; by the time she sweeps you out with the crumbs, Mary will have arranged for you to rent a sailing dinghy, a horse, a bicycle or a sand yacht, or booked you on a boat trip to see the seals at Scott Head, while drawing you to the endless beach at Holkham or to the wild bird sanctuary between

Blakeney and Cley next the Sea. If lazing among little shops better suits the tenor of your break, then the little town of Holt is a Domingo aria for the acquisitive (though very quiet on Sundays). This narrow-walled Georgian spidertown in the web of north Norfolk offers everything from stylish clothes (The Warehouse) to three floors of secondhand and antiquarian books (Tristram Hall).

Did I hear "Lunch"? The choices are as endless as the pubs that

spring out in the nick of time from the sides of tiny roads or village greens, and such prandial pleasures could be followed by an afternoon's wandering among the endless ancient churches along the coast (Binham Priory, Cley and Blakeney churches are particularly memorable), or among the grounds and garden centre of Holkham Hall, seat of the Earl of Leicester.

At night, when your taste buds flower, you can treat them to the finest food at Yetman's of Holt, or at Bernard & Carla Phillips, The Moorings at Wells-Next-The-Sea, or let them blossom among unhurried curries at the Taste of India, also in Holt, before slipping quietly through Great Snoring on your way back to bed.

Let no one tell you that Norfolk is flat. It rises from climax to climax while keeping in perfect tune with you, whatever your mood and however sharp your mind may be. You prefer hills and dales? The skies at sunset are as beautiful and mountainous and as snow-capped as the Alps, and are guaranteed to break nothing more substantial than your heart.

SIMON GOUGH

Hi-tech wizardry takes a pew

Once upon a time, Norwich could host a church for every Sunday and a pub for every day. This was reason enough for the annual fortnight messing about on boats on the Norfolk Broads to be tempered with a few days ashore to explore the most complete medieval city in England.

The city skyline is peppered with spires; but although the pubs are as full as ever, the same cannot be said of the churches. That is to say, they are not full with the faithful petitioning the Lord with prayer. Many of the buildings are now redundant but some have found other uses.

One of the most imaginative is at the former St Michael Coslany, a church whose fine inlaid flint, typical of the region, has been compared to the ivorywork of old cabinets. The building has been given over to Inspire, part of the Science Project Federation, an educational charity, which has transformed it into a hands-on science centre. Where once were pews there is now all manner of high-tech wizardry guaranteed to occupy the most curious of young minds.

Norwich is easily negotiable on foot and this is the best way to discover its architectural gems, hidden down winding, cobbled streets. The jewel in the city's ecclesiastical crown is the cathedral, a place of immense beauty and serenity. It is made of pale Caen stone from Normandy, and is a soaring testament to Norman building skills.

Inside are many treasures. Its chapels are rich with ornaments and paintings; and a reliquary arch (in which, until the Reformation, relics of the saints were kept) now houses a glittering array of

FACT FILE

■ The author was a guest of the Hotel Norwich (01603 787260). Dinner, B&B from £32.50 per person.

■ Norwich Area Tourism Agency (01603 763062) has a free holiday guide containing details of discounted country breaks.

■ Other places to visit: the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, has sculptures and paintings from around the world. The building, designed by Sir Norman Foster, has won several awards. Open Tuesday-Sunday (01603 592467). Norfolk Rural Life Museum & Union Farm, Gressenhall. Award-winning museum with working farm. (01362 860563). Thirby Hall Wildlife Gardens, 150ly, Great Yarmouth, has rare animals from Asia in landscaped grounds; willow pattern garden and crocodiles in the swamp house (01493 369477).

■ The Norfolk and Norwich Festival takes place in October.

silver chalices and communion plate on loan from the diocese's churches.

One of the cathedral's more intriguing artefacts is the Saxo-bishop's throne behind the high altar. A recess directly underneath probably once contained relics whose essence, it was believed, could rise up through the "flue" and give the bishop seated above some divine assistance. Until

the Reformation the cathedral was the home of Benedictine monks. The monks' door leads directly from the cathedral into expansive cloisters. In the dappled sunshine, these are a haven of tranquillity in a bustling city.

When it came to building, the Normans thought big. Norwich Castle, an impressive stone keep built as a Norman garrison, is now the largest and finest of the many local museums. It houses the Colman Collection of works by the Norwich School of artists, the world's largest collection of British ceramic teapots, and a fascinating geology gallery with a complete ichthyosaur and a limestone slab with a dinosaur's footprint.

Strongly recommended is the guided tour of the battlements, for glorious aerial views of the city (not for the vertigo sufferer; but, if you do go, take binoculars), and the dungeons, which have the full panoply: whipping posts, thumbscrews and a ducking chair (popular with the children in the party).

There is also a gruesome display of the death masks, tufts of hair and all, of those who swung from the gallows on nearby Castle Green; and only nervous laughter met the guide's disclosure that what were once the condemned cells are now the women's lavatories.

The entrance ticket to the castle includes admission to the adjacent Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum, which is reached through the former prisoners' tunnel, now a realistic reconstruction of a First World War communications trench.

Norwich is no great distance from the coast, and the coun-

ty's northern shores have several pleasant Victorian seaside towns. So we drove north in the morning sunshine through what is known as the "Garden of Norfolk". It was here that the last man was hanged in England for sheep-stealing.

Our destination was Langham and its glassmaking factory, although the complex of 18th-century red-roofed flint barns give it more of a cottage industry feel. Here was something quite different: to look down from a viewing gallery as the master glassmaker, who provided a running commentary, blew, teased and fashioned glittering crystal creations of exquisite beauty from molten globules.

After lunch in the rustic, beamed restaurant — and an

energetic spell (for the children, that is) in the adventure playground in the walled gardens surrounding the complex — we took the coast road east to Sheringham. The town is home to the North Norfolk Steam Railway, a full-size affair which meanders to Holt through countryside designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

On our return to Sheringham we allowed ourselves a bracing walk along the sea-shore cliffs, until the lengthening shadows of the setting sun sent us back to Norwich and the creature comforts of our hotel. There we had time for a leisurely dip in the pool before dinner.

PATRICK O'HANLON



The spire of St George's in Norwich, where there used to be a church for every Sunday

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■ MOOR RAMBLING: the walking specialist Moorland Rover (01998 760523) offers six-day walking breaks on Dartmoor

TRAVEL EXTRA

and Exmoor from April 28 to May 2 for £349. The trip, taking in Tarka country and the north Devon coast, and covering ten miles a day, is led by guides from the Devon Wildlife Trust. Half-board accommodation is included in the price.

■ SUNDAY TEE: the four-star Five Lakes Hotel, Golf and Country Club (01621 868888), near Maldon, Essex, offers golfers a Sunday Driver break for £85, including two 18-hole rounds on Sunday and Monday morning, Sunday night dinner, and accommodation, breakfast and use of the hotel's other leisure

facilities. The offer, based on two people sharing a double/twin room, is available until December 22.

■ LUXURY PADDLE: Heritage Touring (01305 366440) offers a weekend break in the four-star Thorbury Castle hotel near Bristol on May 3 for £329, including a trip down the Bristol Channel aboard the *Waverley*, a restored paddle steamer. The *Waverley* will join a flotilla accompanying the *Matthew*, a replica of the ship skippered by John Cabot which is repeating his voyage of 500 years ago to discover Newfoundland. The price includes two nights' hotel accommodation with dinner, breakfast, and buffet on the *Waverley*.

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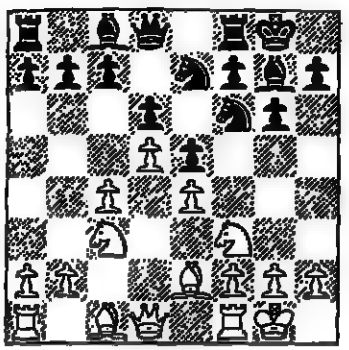
CHESS

by Raymond Keene

I OFTEN hear the complaint that chess is rendered unnecessarily difficult by the proliferation of modern opening theory. If you do not know the theory of the openings and face a player who is well-prepared you may find yourself playing the middlegame with one hand tied behind your back.

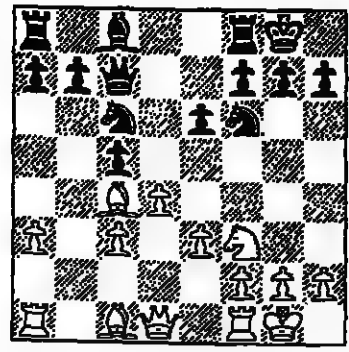
Bobby Fischer's innovation, *Fischerandom*, was designed specifically to combat this problem. In *Fischerandom* the starting order of the pieces is shuffled randomly, with both sides adhering to the piece array which is thus selected. As a stroke, opening theory is abolished. However, a drawback is that several pieces may end up on quite inappropriate squares.

An interesting alternative has been suggested to me, namely that enthusiasts might play from specific opening positions in which development. There is a precedent for this. Arabic players of a thousand years ago established "Tabiyas", or fixed opening positions, which they quickly set up on the board with little thought as to move order or subtleties of sequence. This week, therefore, I intend to propose three modern Tabiyas in which you can try your hand with either colour.

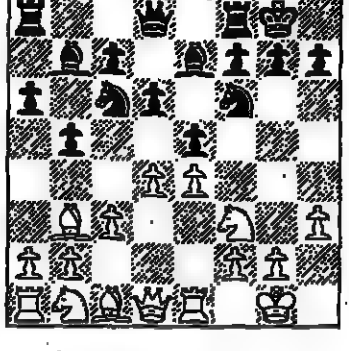
Tabiya 1
King's Indian Defence
White to move

This follows 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d5 5 Nf3 0-0 6 Be2 e5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 d5 Ne7. White's plan is to attack on the queenside, with moves such as b4 and c5 and quite often Ne1-d3. Black will counter on the king's flank, moving the king's knight either to h5, e8 or d7. This frees the black king's pawn army for a general mobilisation, based

on ...f5, ...f4, ...g5 and ...g4.

Tabiya 2
Nimzo-Indian Defence
White to move

This is reached by 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 c3 0-0 5 Bd3 c5 6 Nf3 d5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 a3 Bxc3 9 bxc3 dxc4 10 Bxc4 Qc7. White's plan is to drop his c4-bishop back to a2 or d3 and then advance in the centre with moves such as e4 and d5. Black's various counter-measures include an instant central counter-punch starting ...e5 or the fianchetto (flank) development of his remaining bishop with ...b6 followed by ...Bb7.

Tabiya 3, Ruy Lopez
Black to move

This is reached by 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Bc4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Bb7 10 d4. Black will consider moves such as ...h6, ...Re8 and ...Bf8 to shore up the centre and the kingside. White has several aggressive ideas: a counter at Black's queen-side based on a4, perhaps, or closing the centre and chasing off Black's queen's knight with d5. I would be pleased to hear of readers' experiences from these pattern positions.

WINNING MOVE

By Raymond Keene

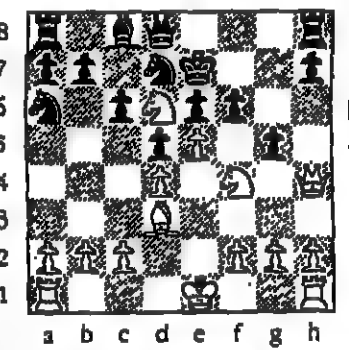
White to play. This position is from the game Speyer - Couvee, Holland 1902.

The black king has already been forced to move, and now his pawn cover has become loosened. How did White now make him swiftly regret these deficiencies?

Send your answer on a postcard to *The Times*, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN. The first correct answer drawn on Thursday will win a year's subscription to the *Staunton Society*, which includes a free invitation to the annual dinner at Simpson's-in-the-Strand. The answer will be published next Saturday.

Last week's solution: 1 Qg8+

Last week's winner: E M Nowell, Guildford, Surrey.



No 1060

ACROSS

- 3 Spinal column segment (8)
- 7 Desert illusion (6)
- 8 Not sympathetic (6)
- 9 Attractively old-fashioned (6)
- 10 Way to get 17: card game (6)
- 11 Ribbon: type of window (4)
- 13 Artificial human (Jew. legend) (5)
- 15 Get higher (4)
- 17 To the other side (6)
- 18 Work for seven players (6)
- 19 NY river: Mrs. Holmes's landlady (6)
- 20 Straight manage (6)
- 21 Tiny details (8)

DOWN

- 1 S. Am. mammal, its wool (6)
- 2 An outcast (6)
- 3 Giddy feeling (7)
- 4 Temper outburst (7)
- 5 Port on heel of Italy (8)
- 6 Right to be heard (8)
- 11 Angels (8)
- 12 Richard Brinsley, dramatist (8)
- 13 Not have enough (2,5)
- 14 One programme in series (7)
- 15 Prince, 17C admiral: - Bear (6)
- 16 Quick drawing (6)

SOLUTION TO NO 1059

ACROSS: 5 Exultant 7 Unable 9 Ricochet 11 Pant 12 Coper 13 Rebuke 15 Bistre 17 Ground 19 Dine 20 Glisters 22 De Luxe 23 Porter

DOWN: 1 Metric 2 Inch 3 Subtle 4 Sent 6 Exceptional 8 Black Forest 10 Corot 14 Bogus 16 Regret 18 Losers 19 Dodo 21 Impi

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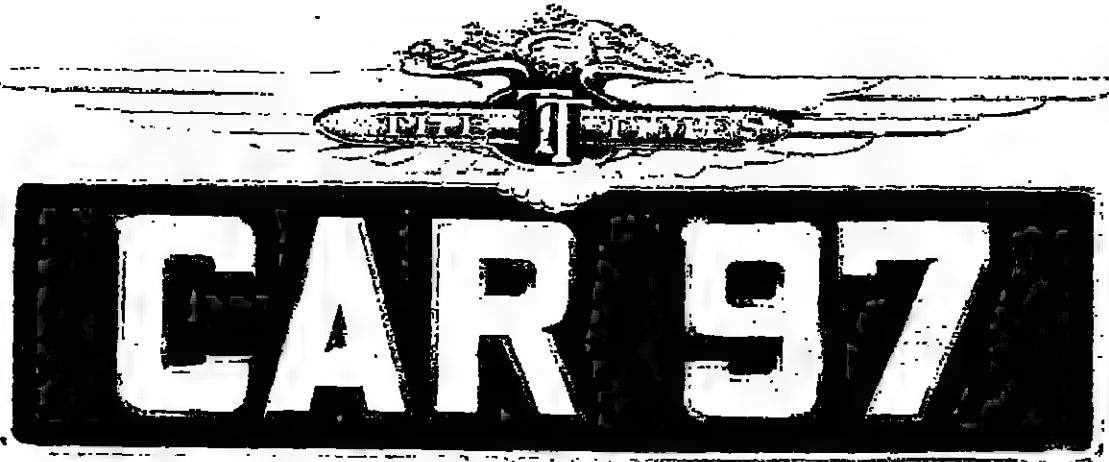
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سجل من الامارات



A taste of life with the fast girls at Brands

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The car that takes the strain of quick braking

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SATURDAY APRIL 5 1997

Bespoke Bentley that's a brute

Would you do this to a shiny new limo?

Ian Morton drives with the Italian who did

In Crewe, they scarcely believed it. They had gone to all that trouble over fine lines and facets to make a big car look powerfully compact yet graciously poised. They had lavished upon it coachwork of unrivalled quality and had sculpted a wood and leather interior in the finest English tradition. They called the result the Bentley Continental R, and they were charging a mere £193,428 for it.

Then along came this fellow from Milan who wanted almost everything modified, with a great brutal metal and wire mesh face on the front, the rear seats removed, the trim stripped out and replaced with machined aluminium and leather quilting, and the engine enlarged to seven litres. And lots more — over 50 features were to be radically changed. And when they told him it would more than double the price, he shrugged and said, "OK."

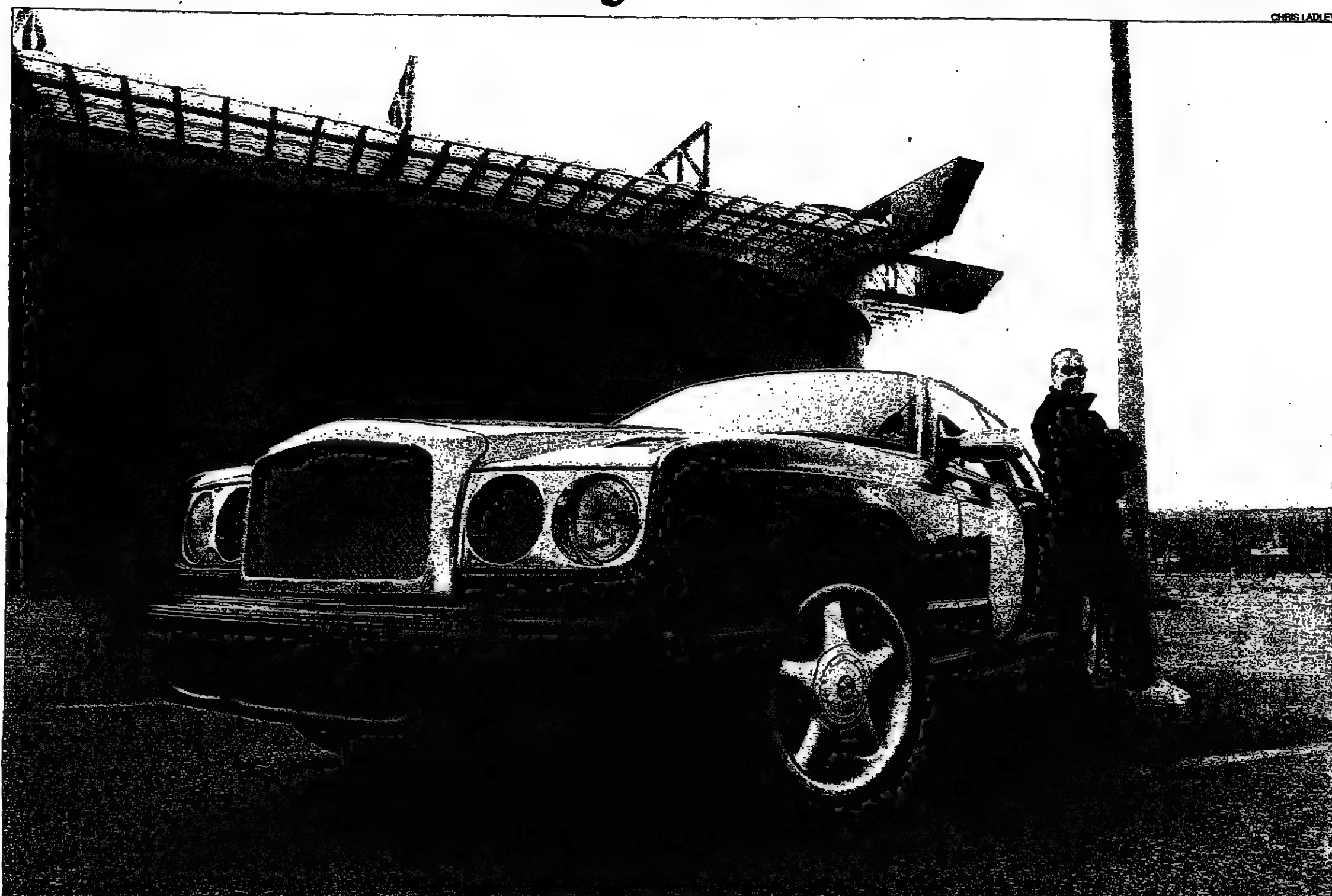
It was their own fault. Rolls-Royce and Bentley have taken to inviting customers to request individual treatment on their cars, and have an extensive department, Mulliner Park Ward, to carry out special work. But work this special was unheard of.

He had his own way, of course. Carlo Talamo is not only their best customer in the whole of Italy, but the man in whose hands their fortunes in that country effectively rest. So the car he wanted, the one they call the Bespoke Sports Bentley, is a reality — about £300,000 worth of reality, the most extensively customised Bentley ever.

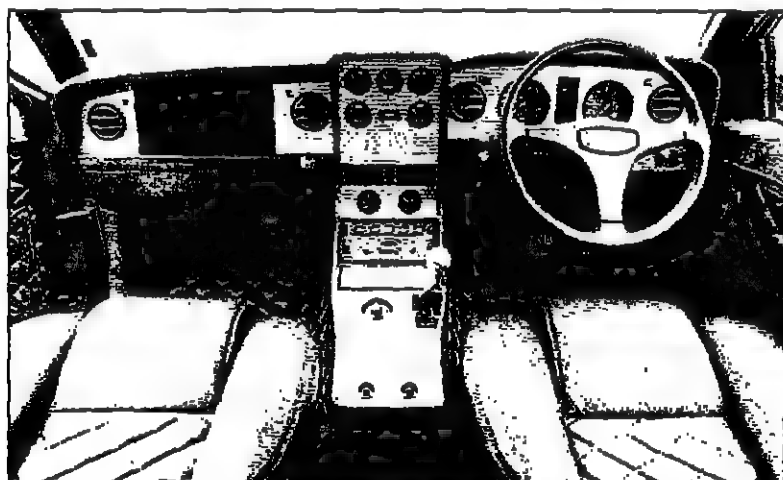
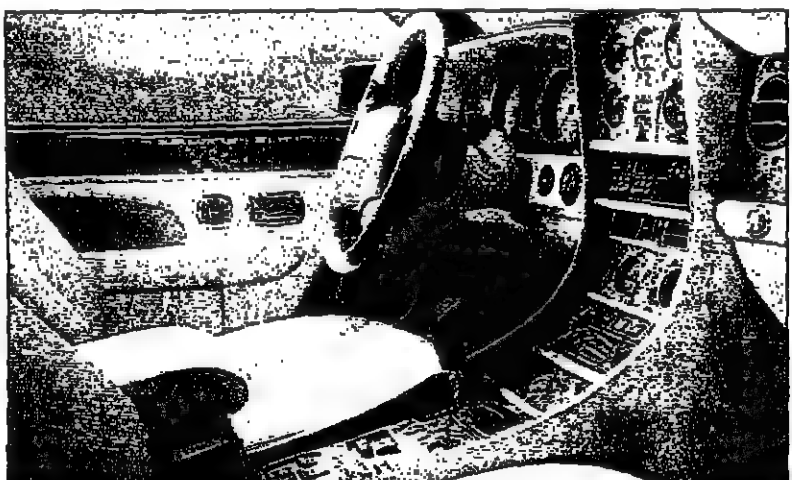
And the company has grown proud of it, calling it a "high-performance, light-weight road-and-track derivation of the Continental R with prominent Bentley sporting tradition, visual features and styling cues".

Yes, plenty of those, though in sheer performance terms the car seems at first to provide a graphic illustration of the law of diminishing returns. All that work, all that expense, and on paper, the Bespoke looks only modestly quicker than the model on which it is based. The Continental R shows 0-60mph in just over six seconds, for example, while the Bespoke pulls the time down to 5.4. The standard car is credited with 151mph, while the Bespoke hauls 160. Useful, but worth all that money?

The power emerges in real traffic. The enlarged V8 unit, Cosworth-prepared with new camshaft and turbocharger and tuned to take super-unleaded petrol, develops 670lb of torque at only 800rpm (the standard engine gives 553 at 2,000), and delivers 425bhp over the original's 385 via a seamless automatic box.



Proud owner Carlo Talamo with his Bespoke Sports Bentley. The beefed-up engine and weight savings make for awesome acceleration — a good thing, because Talamo plans to let his mother drive it



Just a trim: out went the traditional sculpted wood of the original Continental R, left, and in came machined aluminium and quilted leather

Much of the expense has been incurred by weight-shedding, and the car is 240kg lighter than the R. That is like not having the fattest of those three tenors in the back.

The resultant ability of the Bespoke to respond to a bit of free road-space has to be experienced. Where the factory model takes about 3.5 seconds to surge from 50 to 70mph, the Bespoke needs little over two, the process accompanied by a great rising chord of exhaust wall fit to fill a cathedral. You are thrust

into your seat and you stay there, a helpless captive, until the accelerator lifts.

Come the curves and the lateral forces are equally assertive, for the road-holding is monumental. The racing harnesses which have replaced normal seat belts are no conceit. Nor is the huge leather-clad roll-cage which replaces the rear seats.

The creaking of the roll-cage's leather against the leather of the thickly padded roof lining is the loudest and most persistent sound. "I

could stop that by using leather cream, but I like it," says Talamo. "It is the sound of a living car."

Other oblique attitudes surface. Though it will live in Italy, the car is right-hand drive. "If my business goes wrong and I have to sell it, that will be easier in England or Japan," he explains. There are no airbags. "With the harnesses, you don't need them, but there are too many rules anyway — let me die in my car if I want to."

And the suspension is softer

than standard, so that the body cuts through bends. "I like body roll — roll is natural," says Carlo. "Cars ride flat and suddenly they quit. Roll gives you more signals."

The softer ride pays off over Milan's tram lines, which is handy because the Bespoke will be daily transport. Not that it is unwieldy in close traffic. After a few minutes of familiarisation, I had no hesitation going for rush-hour gaps let alone seizing opportunities on the autostrada.

I was encouraged by the

sharp reactions of the keen Italian drivers, plus their obvious respect for a very special motor car.

"It is like driving a boat," says Talamo. "Your mother could drive it." His mother will, he says. Signora Talamo is 74 and has lost her licence three times for speeding. He is proud of his mother and his cars. A true son of Italy.

His cars. Definitely plural. He has more than 50, mainly British, including "six or seven" Minis, four AC Cobras,

Continued on page 2

BUILDING A BESPOKE BENTLEY

■ TAKE ONE 6.7-litre Continental R (list price £193,428) and modify as follows.

■ EXTERIOR: flare front and rear wheel arches, shorten sill strips. Remove bonnet and replace with polished, ducted aluminium. Remove chrome radiator shell and replace with aluminium. Install mesh grille, blank off inner headlamps, and cover with mesh, upgrade other lamps, blank off direction indicators. Replace headlamp surrounds and door mirror caps with polished aluminium. Delete all bumper brightwork, mount flush direction indicators, apply mesh to lower aperture. Install Aston Martin-style aluminium filler cap. Fit 18-inch five-spoke wheels with low-profile Goodyear tyres. Finish in Milano Green with white racing decals.

■ INTERIOR: remove rear seats and all rear comfort items, refit area in black diamond-quilted leather, install leather-covered roll-cage. Replace front seats with manually adjusted seats. Remove door trim, carpets, rear console, and driver's armrest, and install black diamond-quilted leather on doors and black quilted overfett on floors. Install oak door-capping and waist-rail to achieve continuous "bath-tub" effect. Remove standard fascia, install engine-turned aluminium panels, revise all switches. Transfer lock, window, and boot latch controls to driver's door only. Replace standard gearshift with aluminium cranked stem and knob. Remove airbags, install three-spoke steering wheel, remove tilt-steering facility. Install drilled stainless-steel pedals. Remove fuel tank, install 18-gallon racing-spec fuel cell. Remove spare wheel, reposition battery.

■ MECHANICAL: Enlarge V8 engine capacity to seven litres with new camshaft, new turbocharger, revised cylinder heads. Install ram-air intake, extra cooling. Tune for super unleaded 98-octane fuel. Install traction-control system and high-performance brakes. Remove cruise control. Modify exhaust system with no main catalyst and twin tail pipes.

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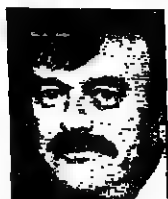
To travel in hope is not to arrive

More reliable cars mean more breakdowns: now there is a paradox to start us thinking. But there is no other logical explanation for the fact that the motoring organisations were as busy as ever over the Easter weekend. Manufacturers sell heavily on reliability, so why is that chap standing at the side of the road with steam coming out of his radiator (and his ears)?

The answer is that cars may change, but people don't. We put more faith than we like to admit in machines. In spite of the second law of natural physics: if it can go wrong, it will go wrong. Although the British are inclined towards pessimism, we make a touching exception for cars.

We believe that a vehicle that has taken us from, say, Chiswick

DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION



Peter Barnard

to Wembley every day of our working year will cheerfully chug from Chiswick to Penzance and back in a weekend at speeds ranging from the untaxing 70mph of motorways to the taxing crawl of holiday jams.

Part of the problem is the

sophistication of the machine itself. It must be at least ten years since I did anything in the engine compartment more difficult than changing a fan belt. Lift the bonnet of most modern cars and we might as well be looking at the propulsion unit of a Boeing 747.

Sealed-for-life batteries mean that we ignore them completely, forgetting that the battery may be all right but the terminals can be altogether a different matter (smear them with petroleum jelly, or even Vaseline, when you buy the car and you won't regret it).

Indeed a survey sent to me by the RAC shows that in 1996, more than 10 per cent of call-outs involved either a flat or a faulty battery. That means that 325,000 drivers had to summon the RAC because of battery problems. This is a case where developments in

technology have worked for us and against us.

Modern batteries are better than they once were but they give little warning before packing up. Any sluggishness in starting usually means the battery needs replacing. And sealed for life means sealed for the battery's life, not the driver's. A battery lives for three

years and after that both it and its owner are on borrowed time.

Water? The advent of header tanks means that we no longer have to open the radiator itself. In fact the last time I had to do that was in Saudi Arabia, nearly 20 years ago: the cap came off with such force that it knocked a dent in the underside of the bonnet.

That fearsome prospect is long gone, yet any AA or RAC patrol will tell you that the first time some of the Easter travellers thought about water was when it had turned to steam and was obscuring their vision. "The funny thing is," one AA man told me, "people will have umpteen bottles of water inside the car in hot weather but

they haven't considered giving the engine any."

Tyres? The standard advice is to check them at least once a week and before every long journey. But who does that? No, nor me. Large capacity fuel tanks and highly efficient engines mean that drivers spend less time at petrol stations, where we are most likely to check oil and water levels and tyre pressures.

Another interesting aspect of the RAC survey is that alternator, carburettor and starter motor problems come fourth, fifth and sixth in the causes of breakdowns. I am not sure what to make of this: either these cars are not serviced often enough, or the service does not always cover these items. I have no idea exactly what a 10,000-mile service on my car covers and I doubt that many of us do.

But I ought to know. The bottom line here is that engine-management systems and generally more sophisticated cars ought not to be treated as if they are infallible or as if they will bite us if we touch them. This summer, nobody with a serious and unavoidable breakdown wants to wait several hours for help because 50 people who haven't attended to the basics are being sorted out elsewhere.



One less cylinder — that's the Corsa Sting

Stuart Birch enjoyed finding that good Vauxhalls come in threes

Just turn the ignition key, drive a few yards and you will know that the Vauxhall Corsa Sting is not like most other cars.

The distinctive beat, beat, beat from beneath its bonnet raps out the message: there are only three cylinders. As speed rises it sounds almost like a turbine. It is unobtrusive and surprisingly smooth.

For those who reckon value for money includes at least a four-cylinder engine, the fact that Vauxhall has had the temerity to lop off a cylinder might cause a fit of apoplexy — but it works. It is designed to save money and reduce pollution, and Vauxhall believes it is very much how small cars' engines should be.

The well-equipped Corsa Sting goes on sale on May 2 and is expected to be priced at about the level of the four-cylinder Corsa 1.2 litre, £8,000 — £10,000.

With 973cc and four valves per cylinder, it produces a modest 55bhp but that is enough to get the Corsa to 93mph, although reaching that takes some time. But each gallon of fuel should take the Corsa an average of almost 50 miles.

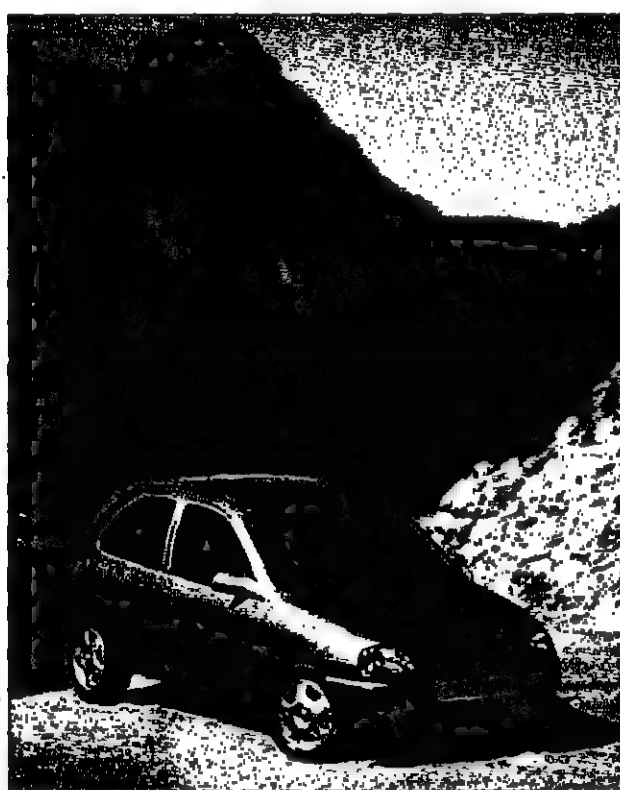
The reasons for giving the Corsa Sting only three cylinders centre on the pursuit of economy via mechanical efficiency. Three cylinders instead of four means less friction, less weight and more response at low engine speeds.

Just losing a cylinder, though, was not enough to achieve a really meaningful gain in efficiency. Developed in General Motors Europe's German Technical Centre (Vauxhall is part of GM) the engine's list of technology highlights is long. Its hydraulic tappets are said to be the smallest ever developed for a production car engine. And its fuel injection is a sequential type, producing fine jets of fuel and air to aid both economy and cleaner emissions.

"Smart" electronics help the engine start more quickly, which is another fuel saver. The engine is carefully balanced to reduce vibration.

All this advanced technology may sound impressive, but typical Corsa owners are unlikely to be that interested; they will just know that the engine is not "normal". Won't they be a little wary? Nick Reilly, Vauxhall's chairman and managing director, believes they have no need to be: "A three-cylinder engine is obviously very different. But achieving low fuel consumption and emissions is very important to us and the new engine gives big advantages in these areas."

So that's the technology and how Vauxhall's boss regards the new power unit. But converting advanced automotive engineering theory into every day practice for the school run or 100 miles on the motorway may be something



else. General Motors Europe could have presented the new engine in Holland — all flat roads and smooth surfaces. Instead it chose Tenerife, all mountain roads, hairpin bends and bumps.

I took the little Corsa Sting on a punishing drive from sea level into the lava strewn landscape of Teide National Park and up to the observatory perched more than 7,000 feet up the mountains.

The Corsa is no Hale-Bopp comet, but it moved onward and upward manfully, its little

engine revving hard for miles in second and third gears. Winding its way down to sea level again, it coped very well with tortuous mountain roads.

Lexus has worked to improve the suspension of all the latest Coras and handling is good. On the motorway it cruised happily at 75mph.

The car I tried was also fitted with Vauxhall's new optional electric power steering. It has been designed to take the effort out of steering

STING STATISTICS

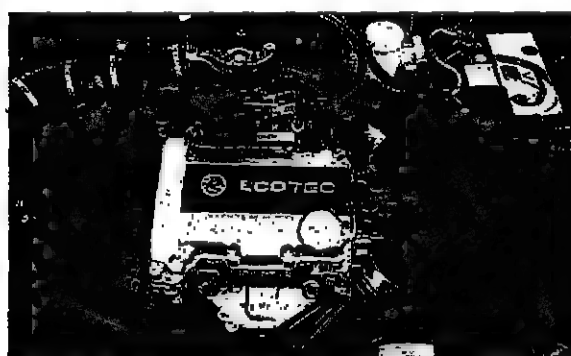
Engine: Three-cylinder, 973cc, 55bhp.

Performance: Top speed 93mph, 0-62mph in 18 seconds.

Fuel consumption: Urban 37.2mpg; extra-urban 58.3mpg; combined 48.7mpg.

Equipment: Three-spoke alloy wheels, radio/cassette, metallic paint, sunroof.

Price: To be announced.



Balanced triple engine is unobtrusive and miserly

without demanding too much engine power. Fitted with an electronic control unit, it only takes power when needed, which saves fuel.

The three-cylinder Corsa Sting also benefits from revisions that are applied across the Corsa range, including front and rear styling changes, improved ride and handling, and the option of air conditioning on some models.

The range also now includes a new 120mph 1.6-litre sport model.

The Corsa Sting's three-cylinder engine was first re-

vealed in General Motors Europe's MAXX concept car at the 1995 Geneva motorshow. Now it is a production reality. Variations on the theme are expected and the three cylinder is a modular design which could form the basis of a larger capacity four cylinder.

Although many companies have researched three-cylinder engine designs, until now Daihatsu has been one of the few makers to put them into production cars. Now Vauxhall has joined them. Others are likely to follow.

'What would W. O. Bentley make now, I asked myself'

Continued from page 1

a bevy of Morgans, and his ultimate choice for twisty mountain roads, a Caterham Super Seven. And Bentleys — a yellow Azure, a vermilion Brooklands, and a black Continental R.

He hardly needed another. But to comprehend the Bespoke, you must understand the man. A self-confessed "crazy and desperate guy", he comes from a wealthy family whose money evaporated when he was ten, but he had already developed a love of classy British vehicles.

"My head was full of engines, nothing but engines," he says. "If they ever set up a hospital to treat engine-dependency, I shall be their first patient."

In 1984, aged 25, he capitalised on his enthusiasm and some motorbike-racing success and persuaded Harley-Davidson to let him become their Italian importer — no great deal. It might have seemed, for the previous year they had sold precisely three bikes in Italy. Now, thanks to Carlo, there are 24,000 Harleys in the country. Later, he

added Triumph, and now sells 600 a year. Today his bike firm, *Numero Uno*, accounts for a third of all big-bike sales in Italy.

Then he persuaded Rolls-Royce and Bentley that he was their best bet in a previously dull region — again only three sales in a year — and in its first year, his new firm, *Gialloquaranta* (it means Yellow 40) shifted 33, mainly Bentleys. Carlo thinks Italy will take 100 cars a year. Crewe is not inclined to doubt him. No wonder he gets his own way.

He works for it. "I live cars and bikes 24 hours a day, seven days a week," he says. "And sometimes longer than that. I have no family, no villas, no servants. I live in an hotel next to my showrooms. "I have been buying cars as a drug. I have been buying happiness. Cars are everything. Cars are passion," he declares.

"I asked myself what W. O. Bentley would make now, and so I did this car. It is a toy, a Mini-Cooper for rich guys. The factory was shy of it, and still is, I think. They



Roll-over replaces rear seats; weight saved equals the heaviest of the three tenors

treated me like a crazy guy at first, but as the car started to take shape they started to say, 'This is good.'

"They are crazy too, a crazy factory which exists outside the rules. But I wanted to demonstrate my confidence in the factory. We need to keep this factory alive."

So will the Bespoke remain unique? Conscious that he is a Bentley dealer as well as an enthusiast, Carlo has declined his right to exclusivity, and given the factory permission to produce other Bespoke

Sports Bentleys. It may well happen. An English fan of the marque who spotted the car during construction instantly offered £100,000 over cost.

And last week, a distinguished visitor who had heard of Carlo's car turned up at the Milan showroom — none other than the Sultan of Brunei, the world's richest man and Crewe's most ardent collector of his cars. He asked to see the Bespoke. It would be unusual if His Serene Highness did not add one to his legendary hoard.

Carlo's imagination, meanwhile, has still some way to run. "I am trying to persuade the factory to take an initiative and build a shorter, wider, lower, two-seater version of the Azure with more power and a tougher name," he says. "We would call it the Blue Train Bentley after the famous Wolf Barnato car. It might appeal to maybe ten guys worldwide."

He would certainly be one of them. I dubbed him the Sultan of Milan. He liked the sound of that.

The future of the small car.

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AUTOFAX by David Long and Les Evans

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AA GRIDLOCK GUIDE

■ **LONDON**
A406 Upper Edmonton; major roadworks on Angel Road (North Circular Road).

A306 Hammersmith Bridge closed both ways. A2400 Bloomsbury; work on Upper Woburn Place and the east side of Tavistock Square.

A5 Kilburn High Road reduced to one lane both ways, with no right turn into Belsize Road.

M4 junction 2 and A4; weekend and overnight closures. M1 junction 2; major roadworks.

A3 Kingston Bypass; Northbound lane closure between Shannon Corner (A258) and Coombe Lane Junction (A238).

A307 Kingston upon Thames; off-peak single alternate traffic on Richmond Road. A232 Wallington; roadworks on Croydon Road.

■ **SOUTH-EAST**
M40 junctions 1a-3; contraflow. A130 Sandown; roadworks on Southend Road.

M27 junctions 8-10; contraflow. A31 Ringwood; contraflow. A11 Watford; lane closure eastbound.

M20 junction 4 West Malling; roadworks, and slip-road lane closures. M25 junctions 8-10; restrictions and lane closures both ways.

A272 Haywards Heath; temporary lights, long delays. ■ **SOUTH-WEST**

M5 junctions 18-19; contraflow. A30 north of Bodmin; contraflow. A35 Christchurch Bypass; lane closure.

M5 junction 13; only one lane open. A40 Cheltenham; temporary lights.

A417 Barnwood Bypass; contraflow in place between the Zoons Court and C&G Roundabouts. A37 near Shepton Mallet; temporary lights.

■ **MIDLANDS AND EAST**
■ **ENGLAND**
A1 Alconbury; only one lane northbound.

A6 Lockington; temporary lights between M1 and Sawley Island. A18 near Broughton; roadworks at Briggale Lodge Roundabout.

A1084 Acle Way Bridge; maintenance work. A41; temporary lights at Sandford Bridge.

A500 Stoke area; contraflow. A5 west of M1 junction 12; roadworks. A41 Wolverhampton; temporary lights on Bliston Road.

B4109 Coventry; temporary

lights on Stoney Stanton Road. M6 junction 6; slip road from Salford Circus to the M6 north closed. Diversions.

■ **NORTH**
A62 Hollinwood; one lane northbound. Major evening delays expected.

A627 Bardley; roadworks. A585 near M55 junction 3; roadworks on Fleetwood Road.

M53 junction 2; bridge maintenance work. Only one lane open each way on Moreton spur.

A567 Boleby; closed northbound between Merton Road and The Strand. A19 Middlesbrough; lane closures weekends and overnight.

A1056 Newcastle; lane closures on the Cradwell Bypass at the cornerhouse junction.

M1 junction 47; lane closures and speed restrictions. M1 junction 42; narrow lanes both ways.

■ **WALES**
A48 Carmarthen; temporary lights and lane restrictions on Pannern roundabout (A484).

A494 Drws-y-Nant, Rhydyfelin; temporary lights. A6025 City Dulas; one-way system, width and weight limits.

A4077 Gilwern Viaduct closed both ways. A44 between Llangurig and Elsteds Gurg; temporary lights.

A483 Fabian Way; lane closures both ways. A4067 Mumbles Road; major roadworks.

A483 Forest-lach; lane closures both ways on Carmarthen Road. A472 Pontypool; contraflow between Pontypool and the Heron Roundabout.

Scotland
A96 Bridge of Don; only two lanes available in peak periods.

M8 junction 2; major roadworks, with lane closures. A923 Dunfermline; roadworks on Bothwell Street at Saint Leonards Street.

A8 Port Glasgow; eastbound lane closures at Newark Roundabout. A710 Strath Road; contraflow between Captains Road and the A720 City Bypass.

A78 Wemyss Bay; temporary lights on Graenock Road. A9 Calvine; roadworks on Perth to Inverness Trunk Road.

M8 junction 30 (Erskine Spur) closed eastbound. Contraflow westbound. M898 Erskine Spur; overnight roadworks with lane closures.

A17 south of Givran; temporary lights for roadworks at Ardmillan. Expect delays.

MAJOR ROADWORKS

Map showing major roadworks across the UK, with a legend indicating 'Jams likely' and 'Other delays'.

Highways Agency Infoline 0345 504030

Is a 35ft Mini stretching a point?

Eve-Ann Prentice talks with the back-yard builders who took Issigonis's world-famous design just that little bit far



Lindsay Haynes's 14ft-long Mini took him 4,000 hours

Lindsay Haynes is one of a breed of men who love stretch marques. Now, after a long, long haul, spending 18 months creating a radically elongated version of the car originally famed for its small size, his customised Mini is being billed as one of the big attractions at a motor show in Birmingham this summer.

The 14ft-long Mini, with leather and walnut trim, took him 4,000 hours to build, at the same time as he was holding down a full-time job. He limited himself to just four to five hours' sleep a night while his obsessive mission was underway.

So why has Haynes gone to such lengths to transform a car which is normally perfectly happy at 10ft long? "Because people know I am interested in cars that are not quite normal, a chap in the pub suggested I make a stretch Mini," he says. "There have always been Minis in my family, but I thought this couldn't be done. By the end of the week I had bought a couple of Minis for £200 and started cutting the bodies up to make the front from one and the rear end from another."

The final result sparked such interest in the Mini fraternity that the National Lottery contacted him to ask whether he could make it even longer for its television advertisement for scratchcards. He couldn't.

The point was that Haynes's pride and joy is a pampered car which has had masses of luxury touches lavished on it, while the lottery people wanted a 35-foot model which merely looked convincing on the outside — and would be ready within two weeks of the request.

"There was big money involved, but there was no way I could do that in such a short time and eventually they had one built elsewhere," he says.

Elsewhere transpired to be Wimbledon, where a model-making company came up with the purple, neon-lit version which is used to illustrate one of the more bizarre uses to which a £50,000 win on a scratchcard could be put.

The organisers of the Mini World International motor show, at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, say they hope that this stretch

Mini will also be put on show on July 5 and 6.

Haynes, 26, from Groby, near Leicester, began his project after a relationship with a girlfriend ended "and I needed something to occupy me". So no one had to wait in the wings while he spent almost every free moment working on the car and just snatching meals when he could. He is now engaged to someone else.

"The hardest aspect of making the car was to get it to look right looking down the side of the car. The Mini is built of curves, you have one big curve from the front to the back. It took a lot of painstaking work, using a very delicate high-speed cutting tool, an air saw. I was slicing slivers and welding them in place. Compared with the sides, the roof was easy," he says.

The cost of materials to build the stretch-Mini was about £10,000, but it is now believed to be worth around £50,000.

Haynes says he now uses the car to raise money for a children's charity, partly by selling advertising space on the car's elongated exterior.

The scratchcard Mini, meanwhile, cost about £15,000 to build, according to Frank Farman, one of the two partners at Eagle Models in Wimbledon who made it. "We also used two Minis for the front and rear, but then we used fibreglass for the middle and installed windows and sunroof. It was all done in about three weeks," he says. "It has a standard Mini engine — but it is a pain to steer."

Mini-enthusiasts have mixed feelings about the elongation of their favourite vehicle. Monty Watkins of *MiniWorld* magazine, says: "I love the idea of Lindsay Haynes doing it as a curiosity, but in general, what is the point? The Mini is about being small and economical."

Watkins believes there are just five or six roadworthy stretch-Minis in Britain, and only about a dozen in the rest of the world.

"They go the other way as well," he adds, "they are called shorties and are only about five or six feet long and there are a lot more of them."

The longest stretch-limo in Britain is believed to be a new

35-foot Lincoln Super Stretch run by Londoner Ian Berne, which can be hired for £80-£100 an hour. And the most stretched in the world is reputed to be a 65-ft long, £500,000 monster called the Ultralimo, which is based in California. It is the length of a cricket pitch, though it has



Haynes chauffeurs his new fiancée in the Mini limousine. He decided to build it after he broke up with a previous girlfriend and needed something to do with his time



The 35ft-long scratchcard Mini was specially built in response to a request by the National Lottery organisers. But purists aren't so enamoured of these grotesques



Stunted Minis, however, are quite another thing

been said of this 36-seater "the difference is that you can get movement out of a cricket pitch".

Mini World International, Mike Kennington 0121-767 3536; Ian Berne Limousine Hire, 0181-500 9469.

Hedgehog April Fool falls flat

BMW's spoof advert missed the point, says Helen Mound

It was the April Fool's trick that fell as flat as the squashed hedgehogs it mocked — the so-called "BMW that communicates with the animals".

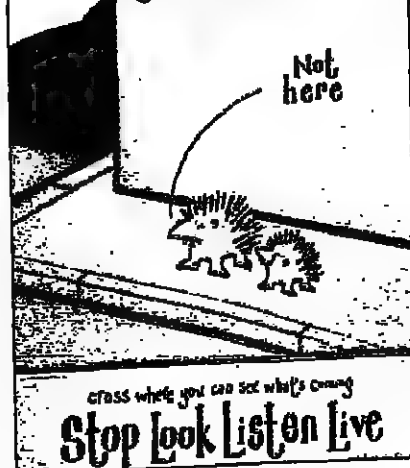
A full-page advert placed in *The Times* on April 1 claimed that, "In children's fiction, it was Doctor Dolittle who talked to animals. Today, thanks to doctors at the Bavarian Institute of Zoology, it is the engineers at BMW." It went on to explain that BMW had developed Wild Acoustic Information Link (WAIL) that emits a warning to scare animals off the road, reducing the risk of their being injured.

But the advert was a hoax. In keeping with a decade-long BMW UK tradition it was an April Fool's joke, the only clue being the words, "Available from April 1 on selected models." Except that the joke was on BMW, as a spokeswoman for the British Hedgehog Preservation Society points out, "We've been selling these things for nearly ten years."

Being run-over is no joke for the hundreds of thousands of hedgehogs that end up flattened on Britain's roads each year. And picking dead wildlife out of the front bumper isn't much fun either. The 650 April Fools who phoned the WAIL Hotline for more information before midday on Tuesday clearly agreed. Perhaps BMW should rethink its extra equipment list after all.

Developed by Alert Industries in America, where motorists suffer horrendous

find a safe place to cross



Safety hedgehogs — or jay walkers?

accidents with deer, moose and other large wildlife, Animal Alert is a wind-driven high-frequency whistle claimed to startle animals to make them run off.

It's not a lot of use if your kids want to spot wildlife from the car, but horses and other farm animals being herded on the road aren't spooked by the whistles because the manufacturers say they don't work at speeds under 35mph. Only at faster speeds are they designed to squeal at a pitch inaudible to humans — similar to a dog whistle — sending birds and animals scurrying into the hedgerow.

Attached to both corners of the car's

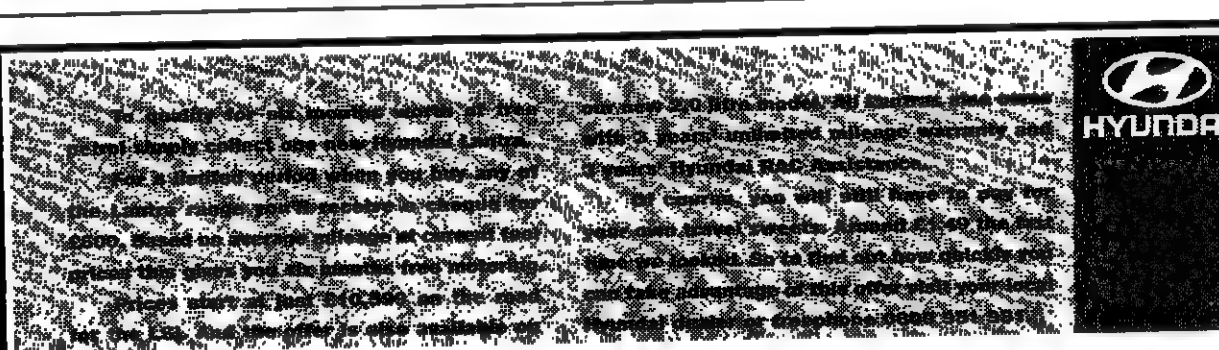
front bumper, Animal Alert whistles cost £8.99 for a pair. Delivered by post they come with fitting instructions and according to one tester, who bought a pair after his dog was run-down, they're so effective that he hasn't hit an animal in eight years.

However, following calls from riders worried about Animal Alert startling their horses, the British Horse Society carried out trials at speeds from 35mph to 60mph. They say they failed to get any response from any animal and reported a "negative" result.

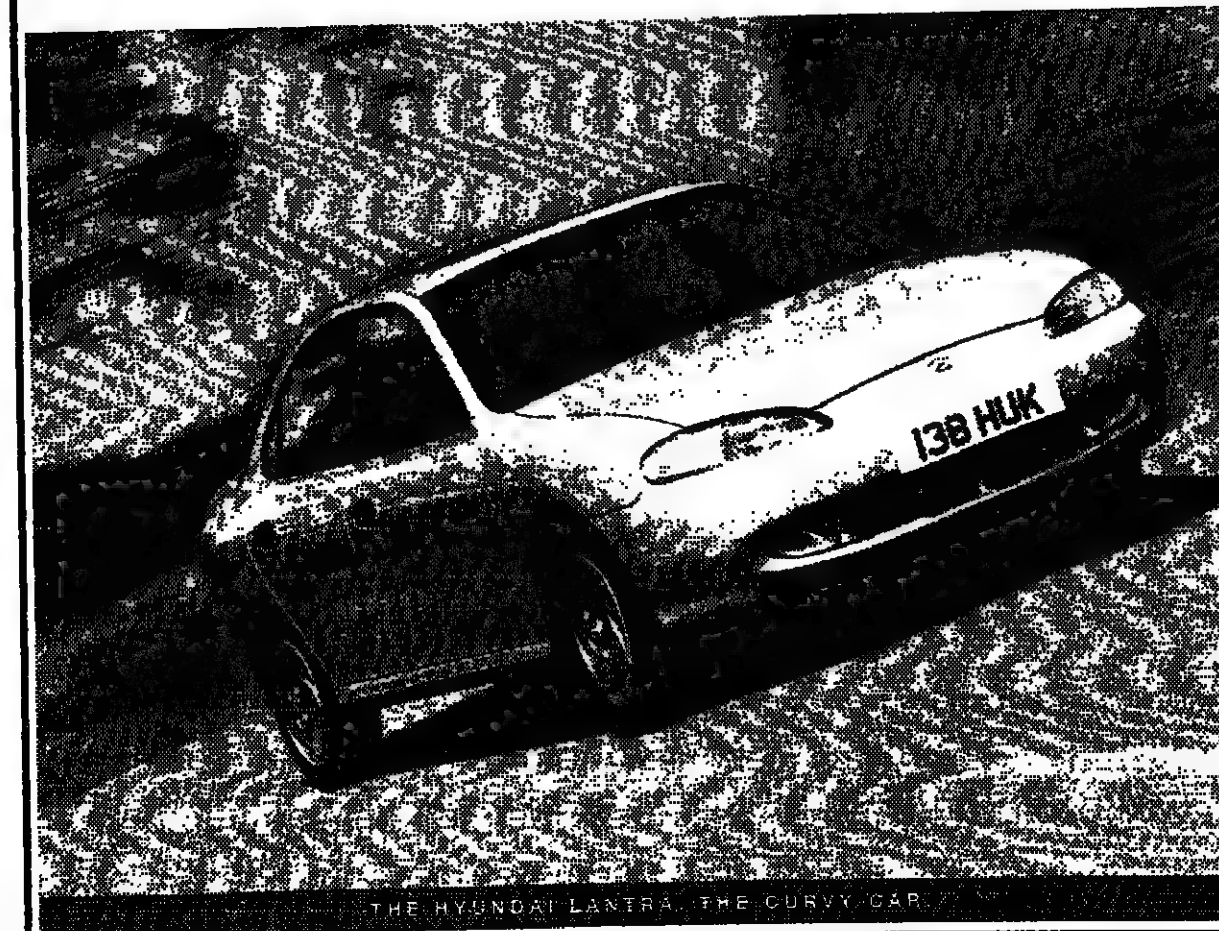
The British Field Sports Society also conducted trials and failed to get a reaction from horses or hounds, and stated: "Riders have nothing to fear from these devices. It would appear that they have absolutely no effect." But during both tests no-one saw any hedgehogs, so perhaps the whistles were working.

Squashed hedgehogs have long been the butt of motoring jokes. The British Hedgehog Preservation Society wasn't surprised by BMW's prank, but they thought it appropriate with Hedgehog Awareness Week just a month away. However, the Department of Transport was recently criticised for choosing two cartoon hedgehogs in a £500,000 road safety campaign for 11 to 12-year olds.

The characters appear on television, in cinemas and on children's videos, showing how to cross a busy road and "arrive alive" on the other side. Safety campaigners complained that the replacements to the Green Cross Code man and Tufty the Squirrel had no road sense and were poor role models. But since when have squirrels been good road-crossers?



Get something more useful than free glasses from a petrol station. Free petrol.



Hyundai Car (UK) Ltd, St John's Place, Euston Street, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP11 1NL. Telephone 01494 428820. Model featured, Lantira 1.6 LS, price £10,599 on the road. On the road price includes delivery, number plate and 12 months road fund license. Price and vehicle specification correct at time of going to press. "Free Petrol" available in form of a cheque for £500.00 from the manufacturer. Calculation based on an average 6 month mileage of 4,750 miles (1997) (see report on motoring), average Lantira fuel consumption of 33.4mpg (Touring, What Car?), February 1997) and an assumed petrol cost of £2 per gallon. Total of £140.64 then rounded up. Alternative offers are available from Hyundai dealerships but not of equivalent value. Offer available to private buyers only and must be first registered keeper. Offer not available on vehicles purchased through Mobility schemes. Vehicle must be registered between 1.3.97 and 31.3.97.

Seat sells out to girl power



Model driver: Jo-Ann Breckon, a former Miss London, races in the Fiesta Challenge and is part of the team teaching potential Seat buyers how to drive on racetracks

Demonstration drives with a difference: a specially picked team of top women racers is touring Britain's tracks to show off Spanish cars, reports Liz Turner

The eyes beneath the crash helmet were smiling, almost kindly. Yet they belonged to a monster who could throw a tiny car around a race or rally circuit like a woman possessed.

Barbara Armstrong, World Formula Two rally champion in Seat's Ibiza Cupra Sport 2.0 16v rally car, knows when to bark — and when to bite. For she is one of a bevy of star female drivers gathered by the Spanish carmaker for a six-month tour of Britain, reaching the public to drive on the track and offering a taste of rally driving.

All were gathered by the energetic Heather McAlpine, possibly the best-known British fast female who has won trophies for truck racing and the Fiesta Challenge, among many others.

The girls throwing the men around on the tarmac include petite Amanda Whitaker, better known for her prowess in single-seater Formula Vauxhall, Andrea Hall, who won the Ladies' RAC Cup in 1996, and Barbara Babbage, who began racing at 14 and building engines at 16, and went on to become the first woman to win a round of the British Touring Car Championships.

Former beauty queen Jo-Ann Breckon has proved a formidable opponent in the Fiesta Challenge. She says: "I was Miss London when I was asked to take a celebrity drive

in a Fiesta, raising money for the Cancer Trust WOMAC, and I found I was hooked." Her goal now is to get into BTCC, the motorsport with probably most contact bar figure-of-eight banger racing.

So how do men react to being advised, cajoled or belittled at for braking too early or being rough with the clutch by young and pretty women. "Most men find it easier to take criticism from a woman," says my instructor, Natalie Barrett. "They don't have to feel competitive with us."

"Some get a bit grumpy," says Jo-Ann. "They don't like being told what to do by a woman, but most are fine."

Indeed most of the men seemed to be thoroughly enjoying both themselves and the scenery. Being taken around at speed by Barbara Babbage has rattled a few fillings, but no-one has been travel-sick yet.

"So how come you like cars?" one of the chaps asks bluntly at lunch, interrupting a conversation between the instructors of their worst crashes, spins and offs.

"I don't think it's strange to like cars," says Natalie. "I think it's normal. I was at university when I decided I wanted to have a go, so I went to Silverstone and took a racing course."

"It's the adrenaline rush that gets you," says Jo-Ann. "It's addictive." Suzie Hart-Banks who has taken the

chequered flag in a Ginetta G27, an MGB CV8 and 100cc karts, also admits that she gets a kick out of beating men on the racetrack.

Among the other competitors, most of the women agree that the younger men treat them as equals, but the older drivers can be patronising. "They call you Pet, or Love. I hate that," says Natalie.

Getting a good car can be difficult, because these women have to persuade the sponsors or manufacturers that they are the very best driver available — and a man will very often get that precious seat.

"Women have to be more determined than the men," says Heather Bailie. "I absolutely reject the idea of a women's series because these girls want to be taken seriously and treated equally. I got into it through my dad and he was pleased his little girl wanted a go. He never pushed me, but he was always there for me."

Just like the men, all these girls work out, run, swim and do aerobics at least three times a week to stay fit and strong. They know they're unlikely ever to face the likes of Michael Schumacher or David Coulthard on the F1 track, because at the very top level, strength is an issue and a man will always have an advantage, but they're going



World Formula Two rally champion Barbara Armstrong prepares to do her stuff

to get as high on the motorsport grid as they can.

Rallying is one area where women often excel — in fact Michele Mouton was within a whisker of winning the World Championship in 1982. This year the battle is hotting up between Barbara Armstrong and the fabulous Simonne Sisters. Watch out, too, for Natalie skidding sideways through the forests, as she's just come off the tarmac and has taken to gravel like she was born to it.

Jonathan Zammet, public

relations manager for Seat UK, admits that the tour aims to get people to sit in his cars and think about buying one. He says: "Test drives are important, and people will remember it more if they're on a track. It's a very rare opportunity to drive on a race circuit and there's less resistance, less machismo, if the teacher's a woman."

If you would like to learn from Seat's A-Team, call the 24-hour Hotline on 0500 222222 as soon as possible, because places are limited.

ALMOST CONVINCED

End of the road for one sexistentialist

Helene Gwynne issued her orders as we approached one of Brands Hatch's more difficult corners. "Third gear — start turning in now!" writes Stuart Birch.

I did as I was told. There is no arguing with people like Helene — nor with Amanda or Jane. Their conversation came in staccato bursts, like a well-mannered machine gun. "Drift to the left, drive to the right, take third, brake in a straight line, straight ahead now, look for the cone on a late apex. Very smooth. Lovely."

But hang on a minute, I'm a bloke and I've been driving for years. I might have even made the occasional joke about women drivers and now here I am on one of the world's most famous race tracks being told what to do by... women.

The big problem is that, if I am entirely honest, this trio, each of whom took it in turns to show me the quickest, safest, least dramatic way around the circuit, knew what they were talking about. In fact — and I hardly know how to phrase this — they seemed not to be merely competent, but to be positively talented at the art of wheel twirling. I said so and got a verbal "nuking": "No, we don't twirl. It's all about smoothness."

Chastened, I kept quiet. Next, they would be telling me they could even reverse a car — not something for which women drivers are renowned.

Anyway, I knew a thing or two about these ace drivers who spend much of their time hurtling around tracks and rally stages. Helene also does some photographic modelling.

Jane some nanny work, and Amanda is employed in an accounts office. So perhaps they really were only pretending to be racing drivers after all. Weren't they?

After many laps being

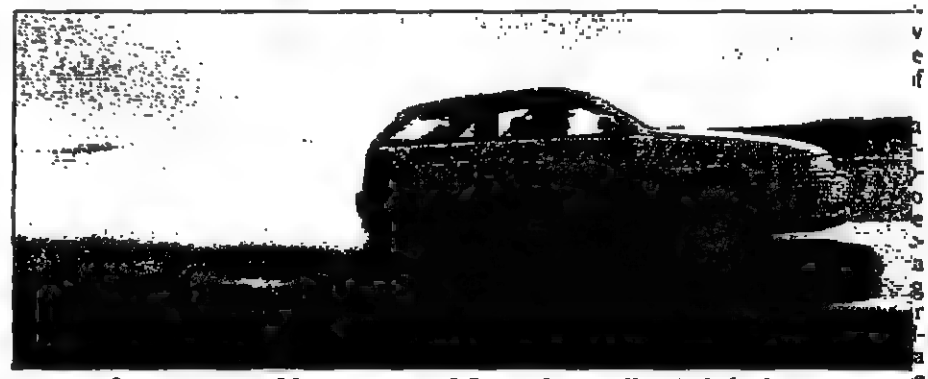
driven, and then instructed by these women drivers, realised that they definitely were not professionals. In progress around the track was being analysed and criticised with precision.

Smoothness, safety, or responsibility rather than sheer speed are the points of the team's advanced driving instruction. But for me there was to be more. Barbara Babbage (worked in a Luton bank for 13 years to pay for her racing) also teaches the science of motor racing. Barba took me round Brands Hatch in 240bhp seven-speed Cupra Sport 2-litre Se Toledo. "Ti words 'Brat now!' kept laing over n brain. After several whirling laps, I emerged from the car, thorough impressed and — yes, reluctantly willing to admit that women drivers are wonderful."

They are talented in the art of wheel twirling

Seat, though, decided to hammer home the lesson, and works only driver, Barbara Armstrong, then gave me the treatment on a simulated stage in the Ibiza she's driven in the RAC Rally. "Are you comfortable?" she asked, as I strapped in her noisy, dusty, raucous machine. Of course I was comfortable — but we were off, stones hammering against the Ibiza's underside, the car sliding right left, right, at daft speeds, trees moving towards the windscreen, corners a proaching at impossible angles. At the end of it I struggled from the car, vowing never again to think, or say, anything about women drivers.

Later, as I drove sedate from the track in a Se Cordoba SKE, my bro cooled by its air conditioning, a simple, comforting fact occurred to me, and broke that promise. It's OI chaps — none of the reversed.



One of the team's 240bhp seven-speed Cupra Sport 2-litre Toledo demonstrators



Mackay with his 1966 V8 Ford Mustang: sadly his family don't see the attraction

Jeepster hankers for a Mustang sally

Chrysler Jeep Imports boss Richard Mackay tells Sue Baker of his passion for 1960s American icons

You would expect to hear the man who is managing director of Chrysler Jeep Imports enthusing about American cars. But when he waxes lyrical about his metallic green V8 dream machine, it is not what you think.

As a teenager growing up in 1960s Lancashire, Richard Mackay espoused the American dream through a fondness for Stateside rock'n'roll and a fascination with V8 muscle cars like the Ford Mustang.

But now that he owns one, deliberately choosing a 31-year-old four-seater to enable him to share a bit of California-style fresh air motoring with his family, his two teenage children rarely want to travel in it.

So Mackay, whose motor industry career has included spells with Renault, Daihatsu and Alfa Romeo before masterminding the launch of Jeep on the British market, enjoys the Mustang on lone outings of nostalgic escapism.

How did you first learn to drive?

My driving life began in Leeds. The first car that I

owned that worked was a Singer 4AB Roadster, which I shared with a mate. It was always on L-plates as we both had provisional licences and only drove it when accompanied by full-licence holders, preferably girlfriends. BSM came to the rescue and I actually passed my test on a Mk1 Cortina.

What was the first car you owned?

The Singer, which was bought for £15 and if memory serves me right, sold for £20. It was a bright red, four-seater convertible and the windscreen used to fold flat. I loved it.

What car do you drive now, and why?

The Jeep Grand Cherokee V8. Although it goes with the job, I love the car — it's very smooth, very powerful and with loads of image.

What is your most hated car?

STEERING COLUMN

I don't think I've ever hated any car. They have been my livelihood and passion for too long.

What is your dream car?

A Ferrari ZFS GTB4. I can't possibly afford one, but to me it's the ultimate. Tremendous looks, tremendous performance, all with a wonderful badge.

What is your worst habit in the car?

Shouting on my hands-free car telephone because I don't think people can hear me properly — this is my secretary's view as well.

What infuriates you most about other drivers?

It maddens me when other drivers don't adequately indicate their intentions and also

when anybody throws rubbish out of a car.

What is the most unusual thing you have ever done in your car?

I drove a Triumph Herald into and through the door of the service manager's office in a garage where I worked when I was much younger. I hit the wrong pedal. The event caused a great deal of noise, dust and confusion. Worst of all, the owner was sitting inside the office at the time and was not amused.

Have you ever had points on your licence?

Six points, for speeding, but it's all clear now.

What do you listen to in your car?

Really good rock'n'roll music. Particular favourites are Little Richard, Chuck Berry and Status Quo.

If you were the Secretary of State for Transport, what the first thing you would

I would pass Draconian measures punishing all vehicles that produce appalling emissions and I would also insist on immediate attention being brought to bear to finish roadworks currently being performed on the M23/J junction north of Gatwick airport.


What is your favourite car advertisement?

The Neon television advertisement because it was our and because it worked brilliantly that we actually stopped advertising.

How and why did you buy your Ford Mustang?

I bought the Mustang American Independence in 1989. I love the colour, shape and the noise, and I hate the fact that I don't get use it more. It's a meta-green convertible model with 210 brake horsepower V8 engine, automatic gearbox, power steering and power hood

Premium precautions

 **MORE THAN 100 Jaguars** and Daimlers will be gathering in the Guildhall Square at Portsmouth, Hampshire, on the evening of May 23 for the start of the *Eniente Cordiale* Normandy rally. Entries are still open to owners of Jaguars old and new for the event, which lasts until May 27 and is organised by *Jaguar World* magazine. Details can be obtained from 0181-658 3531.

Mazda says that the car is selling



parking. Anti-lock braking is standard as is an engine immobiliser and remote-controlled central locking with a built-in feature that prevents its code from being "grabbed".

The other great virtue of the engine must be one of the car's best selling points. For despite the performance that it offers, the V6 is a frugal unit; Mazda claims up to 47mpg at a constant 50mph and nearly 27mpg around town.

The Corolla (1987-92) also keeps its value very well, and even high-mileage cars tend not to look their age, writes *Vaughan Freeman*. Best buy for the second-hand customer is the 1.3-litre GL five-door, and for a 1992 K-reg example with average mileage, expect to pay around £5,500. The Corolla has one serious problem: it has earned an unwanted reputation as an "old man's" car.

■THE SUZUKI VITARA three-door still rates as an automotive fashion accessory, although it is also, within its limits, a capable off-roader. Insurance, at group seven for all models, is low. The Vitara enjoys good build-quality but, like most soft-top models at the moment, second-hand values of late-plate models are suffering.

Even so, the best value-for-money buy is any Vitara built between early 1989 and up to late 1994. Expect to pay around £5,000 for an average-mileage 1990 H-reg J1X hard-top Vitara.

Granada: now sought-after

Riding the wave of 1970s cool, Nissan launched the ad by showing the 1976 film, *Sweeney!* Says TBWA account director Philip Holliday, "Out goes the Granada, in goes Nissan. The car was always essential to the storyline".

Coppers, villains and reps approved the 1972-1977 Granada. It was front-engined, rear-wheel drive, and with three litres of V engine, a Granny provided the option of going round corners and wet roundabouts sideways.

■ **THE TOYOTA COROLLA.** A car well known for its reliability and excellent build quality, has long been a firm favorite with the U.S. car-buying public, reports *CAP Black Book*.

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Ducati's new sports-tourer shows Latin bikes are now back, **Roland Brown** says

Suddenly, though, the Italian industry is roaring back. Leading the charge is Moto Guzzi, once the country's largest bike firm. After going bust in 1966, Guzzi was run for two decades by car baron



In 1994 De Tomaso relinquished control to a Milan-based merchant bank, which appointed bike enthusiast and former banker Arnolfo Sacchi as the new managing director. Sacchi aims to increase the 1993 production total of 3,000 bikes to 20,000 by the year

In contrast, Ducati's recent problem has not been lack of competitive machines — the 916 remains arguably the world's most exciting sportster



Laverda's mighty 1,000cc Jota triple was the fastest superbike on the roads in the mid 1970s. But financial failures and failed recoveries followed — until three years ago Laverda was bought by Francesco Tognoni, a bike-mad local businessman, who has succeeded in reviving its fortunes. Laverda has developed a series of twin-cylinder machines based on former models, and later this year will launch its most promising



Discussion of revivals should not exclude Aprilia, which in recent years has won numerous road-race world

The Gilera name is now used only for scooters — as is that of Benelli, another marque that has won wot titles, and which built a glorious six-cylinder 750cc superbike in the 1970s before going bust. Benelli reappeared in January with a 500cc scooter amid rumours that it is developing a new 900cc superbike. Given the Italian boom such a dramatic return would not be surprising.

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RTK 03	0385	MR TAT	03
RTY 1	0735	TKB 917	03
RTF	0599	TND 53	03
RLM 14	0258	GID T88A	03
RVB 063	0739	TWV 187	03
RS FVVB	0080	TNH 582	03
RRRS 200K	0200	BS TOD	03
	0	083 TOD	03
SAB 100	0450	BA 10E	03
1657 SAD	0460	TDE 534S	03
SAC 87	0250	BS TOD	03
87 SAH	0205	LRM TOM	03

Mercedes launches the car so smart you no longer need a back-seat driver, reports **Vaughan Freeman**

E-Class swot with all the answers

MERCEDES-BENZ E-CLASS

Engine: V6 18-valve 3.2-litre petrol producing 224bhp at 5600rpm through five-speed automatic transmission.
Performance: Top speed 150mph, 0-60mph in less than 8 seconds.
Economy: 18.3mpg in town, 37.7mpg out of town, 27.4mpg overall.
Equipment: Radio, Brake Assist, anti-lock braking, airbags for driver and front-seat passenger, seatbelt pre-tensioners, side airbags, child-seat recognition (this identifies when a child seat is in the front passenger seat and disarms the airbag which might otherwise cause injury in an accident).
Price: £40,000 (ESP option £846 extra).

ROADTEST

If the new Mercedes E-Class were a schoolboy, it would be one of those clever-clogs who always does their homework, knows all the answers, and brings an apple for teacher.

Loaded with technology, the E-Class, which goes on sale this month, seems, like the classroom swot, to have most of the answers.

Strangely, it has taken Mercedes more than a century to answer one of the most basic questions posed by customers: after more than a hundred years in business, Mercedes-Benz has finally provided a radio as standard. It has also done away with that irritating piece of pocket-tearing technology, the car key. Instead, drivers get a wedge-shaped piece of technology known as the ELCODE, which uses radio and infra-red beams to chat to the car's computer brain.

ELCODE (Electronic Code System) allows owners to unlock just one door, all the doors, or doors, windows and sunroof, from a distance so that the car can be cooled down on hot days before climbing in. And it makes a serious stab at trying to put car thieves out of business.

When the wedge is inserted into the ignition slot, the car is able to interrogate it to make sure it is the right one before the engine is started. The key and car even play a high-tech version of *University Challenge*, and set each other advanced mathematical problems which must be answered correctly before the car agrees to start. All of this takes just half a second from the moment the key has been inserted into the ignition slot.

While ELCODE will do much to thwart the thief, the E-Class also features the new Brake Assist System as standard, which recognises when the driver is braking for an emergency and applies full braking pressure to reduce braking distances by up to 45 per cent.

Brake Assist is supported by the Electronic Stability Programme, which allows drivers whose ability falls far short of their ego, to drive safely.

The ESP's on-board sensors constantly monitor the car's speed and direction; when it detects that the car is, for example, going into a corner too quickly or starting to skid, it automatically reduces power to the engine or applies the brakes to one or more wheels, overriding what the driver is doing. The system, which I tried on the ice and snow of

mountainous roads in Austria, is quite extraordinary.

Since the car does not know whether or not the driver is on a cliff edge when he is about to lose control, the system assumes the worst and kicks in abruptly. But it works incredibly well, stopping skids and slides on snow which, without ESP, would have had the car pirouetting out of control.

Head of E-Class development, Dr Bernd Harloff says: "With ESP, sensors register the speed of the wheels and the steering angle, as well as the yawing movement of the vehicle, plus lateral acceleration and brake pressure."

"A microcomputer uses this data to compute continuously



Electronic wedge replaces ignition key — and talks to the car's security system

the maximum, permissible speed for the selected driving direction, and corrects driving errors and skidding and sliding tendencies due to icy or wet conditions, loose chippings or other adverse conditions in which the driver would normally have a great deal of trouble keeping his vehicle on course."

Though the E-Class is loaded with systems and initials, the key to the car is the new 2.8-litre and 3.2-litre V6 petrol engines, which improve fuel consumption by up to 13 per cent and double the normal 9,000-mile service intervals. The platinum spark plugs (there are two to each cylinder), only need to be changed every 60,000km.

The car feels completely secure on the move, and the V6 engine, 30kg lighter than current E-Class engines, is smoothly unobtrusive and matched to the automatic transmission. It makes for relaxed motoring — even when hopelessly lost on a test drive, the ease of driving, the unfussed V6 engine and automatic gearbox combination provided a soothing antidote for escalating "where-are-we" panic.

DR DASHBOARD

Q So these intelligent brakes think more quickly than a driver. What about the one behind in the banger which has just scraped its MoT?

A He shouldn't be driving too close. The Highway Code stopping distances are based on an average car and average driver. The average car on Britain's roads is about seven years old.

Q That means that most of us don't have a cat in hell's chance of stopping as quickly as an E-Class. Would my insurance company understand if I hit the back of one in an emergency stop?

A There's absolutely no reason why they should. The distance between cars has to be based on how long it might take the following car to stop. The stopping power of the car in front is immaterial. You need to be able to brake to a standstill even if the car in front stops dead.

Q But whenever I try leaving that sort of gap on the motorway someone dives into it. What should I do?

A Drop back. We're talking about road safety here, not about feeling hard done by because others want to drive dangerously. Tailgating is one of the worst habits among British drivers. Look at the carnage in the fog last month. In America, driving too close is a specific offence.

Q So instead of making cars brake more quickly, why don't they try to keep cars the right distance apart?

A Funny you should ask that. The Promethean project, which is backed by many major manufacturers, is already working on a collision-avoidance system.

Q You mean it stops you from getting too close to the car in front?

A Precisely. It uses a form of radar which measures the distance between vehicles. If it senses the gap closing it will either apply the brakes or lift the throttle automatically to maintain a safe distance.

No one is saying how soon it will appear on a production car, but given the speed at which technology moves, watch this space.



New E-Class keeps over-enthusiastic drivers off skid row with an intelligent system of sensors that applies the brakes before the car is cornered too fast for the conditions

THE INTELLIGENT BRAKE

SHORTEST STOPPING DISTANCES

30mph

9m thinking distance 14m braking distance

Highway Code Total 23m

9m thinking distance 4m braking distance

Mercedes brake-assisted Total 13m

50mph

15m thinking distance 38m braking distance

Highway Code Total 53m

15m thinking distance 14m braking distance

Mercedes brake-assisted Total 29m

70mph

21m thinking distance 75m braking distance

Highway Code Total 96m

21m thinking distance 32m braking distance

Mercedes brake-assisted Total 53m

HOW BRAKE-ASSIST WORKS

1 A travel sensor detects every movement of the diaphragm between the brake servo chambers

2 By constantly comparing data, the microcomputer detects instantly when the brake pedal has been pressed faster than normal in an emergency. It activates the solenoid valve, instantly venting the rear chamber to apply full brake pressure

3 As soon as the driver takes a foot off the brake pedal the release switch closes the solenoid valve

4 The mechanical control valve in the brake servo is opened, so air rushes into the vacuum chamber

5 Pressure is transmitted by the pedal to the brake servo, or brake booster, which consists of two chambers (the work chamber and vacuum chamber) separated by a flexible diaphragm

6 As soon as the driver takes a foot off the brake pedal the release switch closes the solenoid valve

7 If the driver touches the brake pedal lightly, the pressure difference between the two chambers remains low and the braking effect is correspondingly weak. Full braking power is obtained when the rear chamber is fully opened by the brake pedal being pushed right down

Source: Mercedes-Benz/Highway Code

Vaughan Freeman on Mercedes' new state-of-the-art stopper

For crises: an even brake

A recipe for countless rear-end shunts it might seem, but Mercedes-Benz insists that its new device, which gives motorists the reactions of a jet-fighter pilot, is not part of a plot to boost sales of their rear bumpers and boot lids.

Drivers of the new E-Class saloon from Mercedes will be able to stop faster than anyone else on the road thanks to its Brake Assist System. Mercedes claims the system reduces braking distances by up to 45 per cent to ensure that the child, dog or cat that steps out unexpectedly in front of you has a far better chance of surviving.

The problem is, what happens to the drivers behind? The German manufacturer came up with the idea after research found that in 90 per cent of emergencies, when the brakes had to be applied fast, hard and consistently, drivers either did not hit the brakes hard enough, did not keep the pressure on for long enough, or were hesitant about their braking.

Dr Bernd Harloff, head of E-Class development, says: "We are the first manufacturer in the world to use the Brake Assist System, which cuts

emergency braking distances by up to 45 per cent from a speed of 100kph (62mph).

"Brake Assist goes into action when the driver steps on the brake pedal too hesitantly or too gently in a critical situation. In this event the maximum brake power boost is developed automatically in fractions of a second."

By continually examining data from the system's pedal-travel sensor, Brake Assist is able to recognise when the brake pedal is operated at a speed which exceeds the normal limits. It then concludes that an emergency braking situation has arisen and assists the driver in the proposed emergency stop.

"Our scientists found that almost all drivers step on the brake unusually quickly when a critical situation arises," says Dr Harloff.

In effect, the system identifies an

emergency by "learning" the driver's usual driving habits, and reacts when in an emergency the brake pedal is, understandably, pressed much faster than usual.

Brake Assist measures the speed at which the brake pedal is depressed using a pedal-travel sensor which monitors every use of the brake pedal. When the pedal is pressed quickly enough to indicate an emergency, a solenoid valve is triggered which ventilates one of the chambers in the brake booster and full brake pressure is instantly applied.

In practice, when testing the system in rainy and near freezing conditions, BAS responds in an unfussed manner. In non-emergency conditions, without the instantaneous surge of adrenaline that an impending crash triggers, it is very difficult to make the Brake Assist

kick in since the braking foot seems unable to move fast enough.

Given the right simulated emergency conditions however, with a barrier dropped in front of the car without warning on a test strip, BAS comes to the rescue without any major alarm as it intervenes.

What is apparent is the noticeably reduced stopping distance, and at 100kph (62mph) the car takes as little as 40 metres to come to a halt — close to half the Highway Code's 73 metres shortest braking distance for a 60mph stop.

Normally, such rapid braking would mean an instant skid, but as well as Brake Assist as standard on the E-Class, anti-lock braking is provided, which prevents skids and ensures that the car can still be steered without loss of control.

In the long run, as well as fitting the system to other cars in its range, Mercedes-Benz intends to licence BAS so that it will be available to other manufacturers.

But if your car is the one stopping quickest in the M25's outside lane in an emergency, doesn't that mean that everyone behind will end up smashing into your blazing brake lights?

Mercedes-Benz spokesman John Evans says not: "When disc brakes were first introduced, those cars which were the first to be fitted with them were able to stop more quickly than those fitted with drum brakes, and when anti-lock braking systems were first fitted, ABS cars could stop faster."

The number of rear-end crashes did not soar when disc brakes were introduced, but what they did offer when they were first introduced was massively shorter stopping distances," argues Evans.

"We do not envisage a problem of numerous rear-end collisions with Brake Assist. What we will have is E-Class drivers and, of course, other road users, who will be much safer, and able to stop more quickly."

MERCEDES-BENZ LAUNCHES GT RACER

The revival of GT racing, one of the most spectacular forms of motorsport, continues apace. Most recent entrant is Mercedes-Benz who this week unveiled the CLK-GTR a racing development of the soon-to-be-launched CLK coupé which has been produced in cooperation with the AMG tuning company. It will compete in the new international FIA GT Series for sportscar racing. It carries a 6.9 litre V12 engine producing 560bhp. It has been developed from the plant that powers the company's S-Class limousine in conjunction with the British-based Ilmor company, which also provides the Mercedes engines for McLaren Formula One cars.

The car had its first test last week, mainly in the hands of Bernd Schneider, the 1995 German Touring Car champion, and is said to have met all performance targets. It is likely to make its race debut at the first FIA GT meeting at Hockenheim, Germany next weekend. The car is in the tradition of the famous gull-wing Mercedes 300SL, which dominated sports car racing in the 1950s, and will be taking on entries from Porsche, Lotus, Ferrari, Nissan and others. To qualify for the international series the company has to make at least one road-going car of the same design. The chances are it will make a limited series of ten or 50, and to comply with regulations they will have to cost less than \$1 million each.



CLK-GTR is a development of the new CLK coupé. It will compete in the international FIA GT series

Kevin Eason on our BTCC team's strong start — now they just need better luck, more grip and less debris

'The first two races showed how good the Volvos looked'



Despite our logo on the car, they wouldn't let us peek

This will do nothing to convince customers about Volvo's service schedules: for when Rickard Rydell needed a new engine in his S40, it took the mechanics minutes instead of days.

Rydell discovered that the slings and debris of outrageous fortune can cost dear in motor racing on his first outing in the British Touring Car Championship for the TWR Volvo team, whose progress is being followed this year by CAR 97.

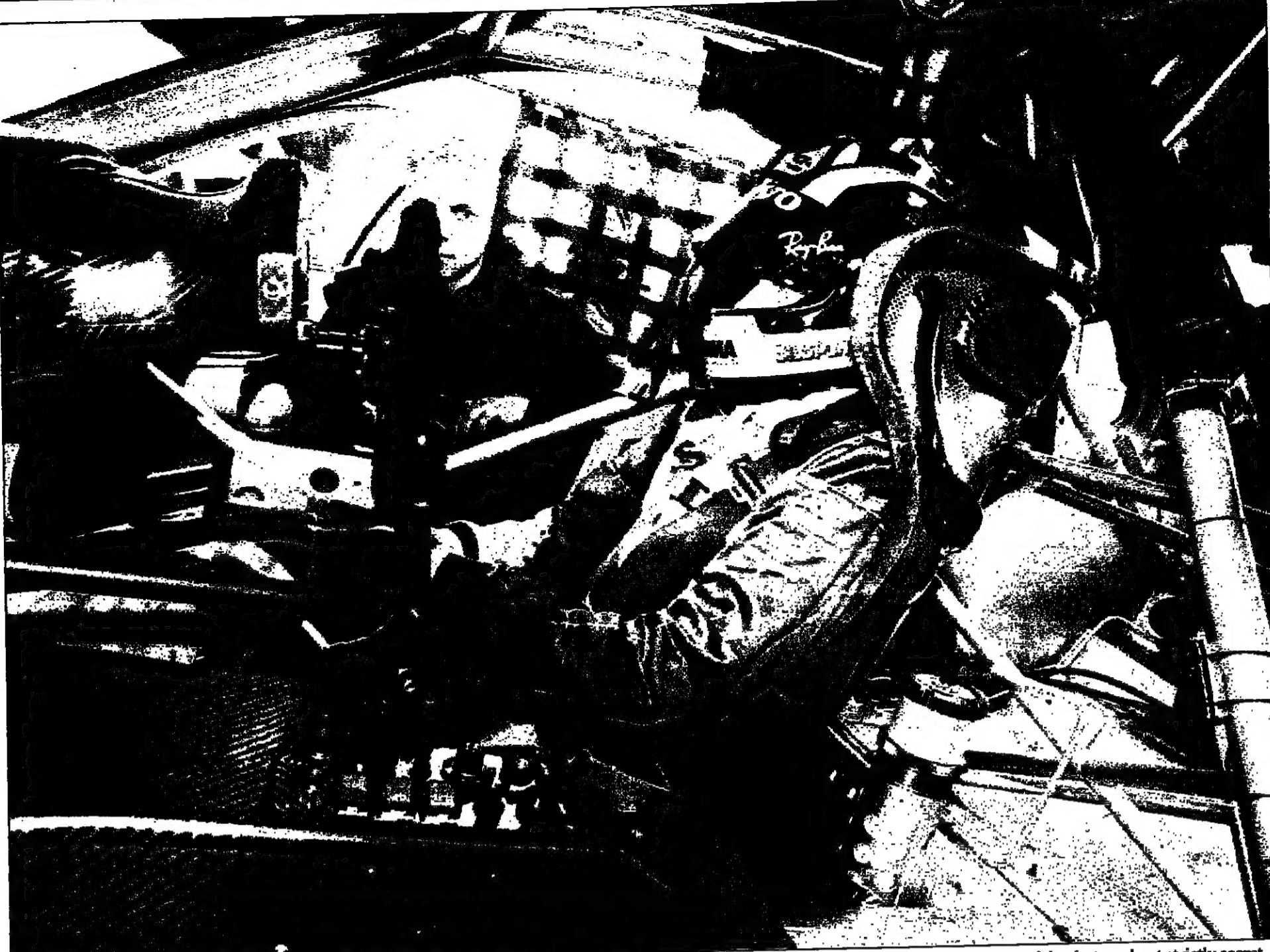
The fabulous Volvo S40s started the weekend looking unbeatable with Rydell, the team's lead driver, posting

record practice times on the Donington circuit.

On race day though, Rydell and teammate Kelvin Burt discovered just what their Formula One rivals, Williams, had up their sleeves with the Renault Lagunas — which won both the first rounds.

In race one, Rydell was hard on the heels of race leader, Alain Menu, and Renault teammate, Jason Plato, when everything went wrong. Suddenly a secure third place turned to nothing when Plato's Laguna flicked track debris into Rydell's radiator. Half a lap from the finish, Rydell's engine gave up.

That gave the pit crew less



TWR Volvo team driver Kelvin Burt readies for the race. Interior shows how his Volvo is no family saloon — the engine tuning includes tricks that are kept strictly secret

than two hours to whip out the remnants of Rydell's race engine and put in another for the second-round race.

Forget the idea that this five-cylinder two-litre is just like the one you have in the family Volvo at home though: the racing S40s have 300bhp available to generate neck-breaking acceleration, thanks to clever tinkering by TWR's

engineers. They take a normal family five-cylinder and create a lightweight power pack that generates loads of power but also costs a fortune: nobody could say how much but you wouldn't want to pay the price for your family estate car.

So secret is their tuning trick that even we — CAR 97, which has The Times logo on the S40 — were not allowed to see the

engine changeover. That is kept strictly under wraps in case of leaks to other teams desperate to replicate Volvo's increasing BTCC success. Instead, the pit garage doors came down while the mechanics worked furiously.

Meanwhile, Kelvin Burt, in the second Volvo, was celebrating third place after Rydell's demise, but complained of a lack of grip that dogged both drivers.

That they should fret: the only worrying was among the rest of the field, for this first BTCC weekend showed how good the Williams-prepared Renaults and TWR Volvos looked against the opposition.

Only Honda's Accords, turned out by Prodrive, the team based in Banbury, Oxfordshire, which makes Colin McRae's Subaru rally car, looked fast enough for a fight.

In the second round, the Renaults and Volvos again tore away from the field, though Jason Plato went off, leaving Rydell to come in three seconds behind Menu. Burt could only manage ninth, still plagued by a lack of grip.

So it is back to the drawing board for TWR's experts, though they believe the next round at Silverstone could tell a much different story. The Volvos are powerful and well-prepared and every race brings a new set of data to tell the engineers where to find another ounce of power.

Then, with a little more luck and less debris, Rydell and Burt could take their first win.

BTCC Drivers' Championship table: 1. Alain Menu, 30 points; 2. Jason Plato, 14; 3. Kelvin Burt, John Birtcliffe (Audi) and Rickard Rydell 12.
Manufacturers' table: Renault 30pts; 2. Volvo, 24; 3. Audi, 18; 4. Nissan, 14; 5. Honda, 13. Next race at Silverstone on April 20.



Anxious moments with the pit crew as the team waits to show Burt how he is doing



Volvo's strength shows in Rickard Rydell's grid position, left. Burt takes third prize

Classic gathering hits the roads

ONE OF the widest selections of classic cars to be seen on the roads sets off from Thruxton race circuit near Andover, Hampshire, on Friday April 18 for the Haynes Publishing Two-Day Classic. The 475-mile non-competitive event has attracted a capacity entry of 330 cars for a scenic and historic tour of the West Country. Oldest car in the field is the 1926 Bentley 3-litre of John Bond-Smith from Oxfordshire. At the other end of the field Aston Martin, Ferrari, Porsche, Jaguar and Triumph from the 1970s are all represented. Haynes Motor Museum in Sparkford, Somerset, hosts the Friday overnight stop and displays a fabulous collection of other historic vehicles. Further details from 01963 440804.



Classics from the 1920s to the 1970s meet at Thruxton

THE CLOSING date for entries to The Times Lease Plan Company Car Driver of the Year competition, our annual search for Britain's best company car driver, has been extended to April 11. Entries are invited from teams of three who drive a company car or other vehicle as part of their remuneration. Entrants must be over 24 and have the backing of their fleet manager. First prize is a trip for two to the Portuguese Grand Prix. Details of regional heats, the Silverstone finals and entry forms can be obtained from Lease Plan 01753 797284.

MITSUBISHI has launched the "Campaign for Galant Driving" to coincide with the introduction of its new Galant range. Every Galant buyer or company car driver and partner will be offered a half-day course by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents to learn about the performance of the car and about hazard recognition and driver perception. "It is designed to improve individual driver performance and promote safer driving through practical examples," says Stephen Dixon, managing director.

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